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SAM CHARCOAL, THE PREMIUM DARKY; or, How the Boy Got Even.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "BOB ROCKETT, THE BANK RUNNER," "BOB ROCKETT, THE BOY DODGER," "WILL WILDFIRE," "DARK PAUL," ETC., ETC.



"TURN HIM THIS WAY, TILL I POLISH OFF THE LEFT SIDE OF HIS NOSE. HERE, AIN'T THAT A BEAUTIFIER!"

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OR,
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BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "BOB ROCKETT," "FRED HAL-
YARD," "WILL WILDFIRE," "TOM
TANNER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT CHARCOAL DID WITH THE PAPER.

"STOP, you sooty-visaged imp of Satan! Stop, I say, you essence of double-distilled midnight, before I split an inkstand on your cast-iron skull!"

"Bress ye, Marse Hunter, isn't I stoppin'? I ain't been doin' nothin' but stoppin'. And I ain't gwine to do nothin' but stoppin'."

"None of your tricks, now! Tell me what you did with that paper, and quick as greased lightning too, if you don't want to take a prominent part in a funeral."

Of the two parties to this dialogue one was a swarthy-faced gentleman, of some forty years of age. He seemed a Southerner by his dress and accent, and his face, while handsome, had in it something that was not altogether inviting. What it was could not have been easily told, yet a good judge of physiognomy would have distrusted him.

The other was a comical-looking negro boy, of pure African descent, for he had the flat nose, thick lips, and large eyes, with an extra allowance of white, of the genuine stock; while his hair was a mass of twisted wool, through which only a steam carder could have pulled a comb. He was dressed in a sort of livery which added to the oddity of his appearance, a cream-colored coat with facings of red which made his complexion seem ten times blacker than nature had intended. And when he grinned, as he was much in the habit of doing, and showed his white teeth and rolling eyes in contrast with his dusky skin, he looked the picture of good-nature and comicality—like the Premium Darky that he was.

This young rogue was standing demurely upright, with as solemn a countenance as if butter would not melt in his mouth, before his angry master, whose embrowned cheek showed the red hue of choler, as he fixed his eyes fiercely on the innocent-looking boy.

The latter scratched his head in a helpless fashion, and put on an expression of the utmost stupidity.

"Fore de Laud, Marse Hunter, I lef' 'um jiss whar you said. Dis nig can't read nor write, but he knows figgers. Der's no mistake 'bout it; I lef' 'um jiss whar you said."

"You lie, you villain! You lie, blast your ugly complexion! Brown swears by all that's good and bad that you have not been near his office. Out with it now! What did you do with it? Or do you want me to choke the truth out of you?"

The boy's goggle eyes rolled in apparent terror, as he gazed stupidly at his master, looking as if all the sense had been scared out of him.

"I lef' 'um at de number you said," he repeated. "Dunno if Lawyer Brown's name was dar or no, 'coz I can't read writin'. But de house had a brown front."

"A brown front!" roared Mr. Hunter, half starting from his chair in sudden spleen. "Hang me if this isn't a new way of reading a man's directions, by the color of his front door! Why, you black catamount, Brown's house is all brick—red and white, and you've made another of your rascally blunders."

"I lef' 'um at de number," reiterated the young darky.

"At number 606?"

"Jiss so. Dat's de place. Jiss whar you said. I knows dar was no mistake, 'coz I 'served dem figgers partik'ler. One ob 'em was upside down, jiss as if de painter stood on his head when he drewed it," and the boy broke into a laugh as if he saw something very comical in the idea.

"On its head?" cried Mr. Hunter, with quick suspicion. "What the blazes do you mean? Take that pencil, blast you! Make the number. Let me see what it was like."

The boy took the lead-pencil offered him, and with much pains, and a plentiful use of his tongue, he managed to trace an awkward representation of the number 609.

"Dar it am, jiss as I tole you. Only de fust one was a-standin' on his head, an' de last one on his tail."

Mr. Hunter looked at the boy for some seconds with a sort of stupefied astonishment, as if such stupidity was beyond his comprehension. He then rose slowly from his chair and took him by the ear, bending him forward till his nose touched the paper on which he had written.

"What do you call that?" he roared.

"Dat am six hundred and six, only de lass six is got a sort of tumble; for all de world 's if it'd been playin' circus."

"It is six hundred and nine, you hound! Do you hear, it is six hundred and nine! You have taken the paper to the wrong number; you charcoal imp! And if you've made any mischief, shoot me if I don't hang you up by the two ears! Away with you now, and get the paper where you left it, and take it to 606, on the other side of the street, mind you."

"Bof of 'em a-standin' on der heads?" asked Sam, as if the idea was just making its way into his thick skull.

"Yes. Like this," and Mr. Hunter made the correct number on the paper.

Coal looked intently at it. He then burst out into a low guffaw.

"An' what do dey call 'um, when he gits round on his tail?" he queried.

"Nine. Remember that, now. Nine. This way it is six. Off with you now, like a greased cat through a knot-hole. Get the paper and take it to Mr. Brown's office, at 606 Walnut, across the street. Do you understand?"

"Got all dat down fine," assured the young soot.

"Then slide."

His master made for him, as if with the intention of aiding his exit with the point of his boot. But Coal had evidently been put through that drill before, and didn't care for a new lesson. He stooped to avoid the threatening boot, shot in a crouching attitude to the door, and in an instant was outside, and beyond the reach of his angry master. He closed the door quickly behind him, and darted hastily down-stairs.

But, once arrived in the hall at the foot of the stairs, and safely out of sight and hearing of his irascible master, a change came over the aspect of Sambo, or Sam Charcoal, as he was usually called. He broke into a low laugh which shook his whole frame as if it was made of jelly. He put his thumb to his nose and twirled his fingers in a most disrespectful fashion. He winked to some imaginary spectator. He seemed completely running over with enjoyment.

"Oh, de marcy!" he cried, between his bursts of laughter. "Oh, de Laud! Was dar ever anybody in sich a stew? Ef ole Marse Hunter on'y knowed, wouldn't he skin dis little nig? Him a-showin' me how to make nine, 's if I didn't know! S'pose he t'inks Coal ain't got no eddication! Oh, de bressed saints, I can't git ober it!"

The young monkey stood on his head and kicked up his heels against the wall, as if to relieve his feelings in that way.

"S'pose I didn't know dat a nine was on'y a six upside down?" he ejaculated. "Didn't have no notion I war gwine to git a 'rithmetic lesson from Marse Hunter. Ef he on'y knowed!"

A door opened on the floor above. In an instant Sam regained his perpendicular and made for the door. It might not prove healthy to be caught going through his present exercises.

Meanwhile, in the office of Smith and Herring, a legal firm which did business at 609 Walnut street, the two partners were engaged in an affair of considerable moment, judging by their interest in it.

Smith was writing rapidly, but carefully. He seemed to be copying a legal document which was spread out before him, while Herring sat with his chair against the office door, as if to prevent intrusion.

"Why, it's a regular windfall," exclaimed the latter, with infinite satisfaction—"a complete bonanza. Luck helps them that help themselves, they say."

"I fancy we were helped," replied Smith, looking up from his work. "We have to thank the blunder of the little darky, who has made some ridiculous mistake."

"At any rate we are helping ourselves now," laughed Mr. Herring, as he pointed significantly to Smith's operations. "I tell you what, Smith, I was in despair of our client's case. But if this is worked well it may put a very different face on the matter."

"Oh, dry up! Don't bother me!" growled Smith. "You made me then put an 'it' for a 'he.' If I am to do this job correctly you will have to set a lock on your jaws."

"I? Why I haven't said a word for a month. You never saw such a quiet fellow. My talk wouldn't disturb a dead mouse."

"Get out, now, before I throw a copy of Blackstone at your head," laughed Smith. "Hist! There comes somebody."

The door was tried at that moment. It failed to open, and a loud knock was given it.

"Ten minutes," whispered Smith. "Get me ten free minutes."

Herring rose and partly opened the door.

"Excuse us," he began. "We are very busy now with a special client. In ten minutes—Hello, Coal, is it you?"

"It's jiss dis 'dential nig," came a melodious voice from outside, and Coal's black face flattened itself against the opening of the door.

"I's arter dat paper which I lef yere by mistake. An' ef I don't get it in quicker nor no time Marse Hunter's gwine to hang me up and skin me. An' I'm afeard dat wouldn't agree wid my delicate constertution."

Mr. Herring slipped out and closed the door behind him. He faced Coal with a very stern aspect of countenance.

"Do you know, you young rascal, you've been trying to get us in trouble, and that if we served you right we could send you to the State's prison?"

A look of terror came upon the Premium Darky's face.

"W'at's I been doin'?" he asked tremblingly. "I ain't done nothin' but fotch you am ole paper, dat's raisin' de berry Ole Scratch, all 'bout."

"You have interfered with our professional honor," sternly replied the lawyer. "You have laid temptation in our way of a kind which, according to the Revised Statutes—but wait. I'll read you the law."

Coal grasped the back of a chair to support himself, while his rolling eyes followed the movements of Mr. Herring, who had taken down a sturdy law volume, and was deliberately opening it, in search of some passage. The boy followed his every movement, as if in mortal fear of the contents of the book.

The grave-faced lawyer had just begun to read some involved law language which had no more meaning to Sam than so much Choctaw, but which affected him the more the less he understood it, when the door of the inner office opened, and Mr. Smith appeared.

"What does the boy want?" he asked.

"He is after a paper, which he says he left here yesterday," answered Mr. Herring.

"Jiss so," stammered Charcoal. "An' I ain't done nuffin'. Marse Hunter sent me arter dat paper."

"Here it is," returned Mr. Smith, handing him a folded document. "Now scoot! And be more careful to hit the right place in future."

The young dark eagerly snatched the paper, and shot like a black comet out of the office. He wanted to get out of reach of that dangerous law book, ere any more of its incomprehensibly terrible contents could be fired off at him.

A few minutes afterward he broke hastily into Mr. Brown's office, on the other side of the street.

"Yer's de dockymment!" he ejaculated, slamming it down on the table, much to the discomfiture of the quiet lawyer, who had not looked for the advent of a black thunderbolt into his office. "Dat's de paper as Marse Hunter's been raisin' de berry Ole Nick about, and a-cussin' dis little nig all roun' de north pole. Dat's de idential dockymment."

With another slam on the table that made quiet Mr. Brown give another slight start, Charcoal turned and made for the door, disappearing as suddenly as he had come.

At the same moment a conversation of some importance was taking place across the street, in the office of Smith & Herring.

"By the seven saints!" cried Smith suddenly, "I have given the boy the wrong paper! He has got the copy and I have kept the original!"

"The deuce you say!" answered Herring. "Jupiter, Smith, that will be awkward if they discover it."

"But Brown knows nothing of the handwriting or signatures," replied Smith, more easily. "And, between you and me, the copy wasn't bad. If it passes muster it will be all for the best. We will have the original to show."

"And the copy?"

"Don't trouble about that. If it don't end in the fire I knew nothing about John Hunter. They have a neat case against us, if they only knew it; but I'll wager high they make a blaze of it."

CHAPTER II.

SAM CHARCOAL IN TROUBLE.

"Look yere, white feller, ye do dat ag'in, I'll bu'st yer b'iler, suah!"

The Premium Darky was surrounded by a group of boys, who were making him the butt of their tricks. His eyes rolled comically around, seeking some avenue of escape from his tormentors.

"Hear till the dirty nayer!" cried the ringleader of these, a boy with a very much turned-up nose and freckled face. "Give t till him, boys. He oughter be in the menagerie."

"It's as good as any ob de white trash, if I is brack," answered Sam, indignantly. "Jiss you go 'way now."

His tormentor answered by snatching a pitcher of milk held by a little fellow who had stopped on his way from the milkman's to see the fun. This, with a quick movement, was poured on Charcoal's curly wool, and ran down in white streaks over his face, giving him a most absurd appearance.

The outraged boy stood moveless, the white fluid trickling out from his thick wool and running down in little rivulets, which were in very strong contrast with his sable skin.

The vagabonds shouted with laughter, dancing and capering around him, heedless of the cries of the urchin who had lost his milk, and who was shedding tears of anger into the empty pitcher.

"Look at the nig! Look at the nig!" shouted the ragged circle. "He's got his face in livery. My eyes, ain't he a jolly white black-bird? Got any more milk there? Let's give him another baptize."

Sam Charcoal made a desperate effort to escape, but he was surrounded by boys larger than himself, and was helpless in their midst.

"Let's straighten out his hair!" cried one of the tormentors. "And pull out his nose! We'll make a white chap of him. Tell you what, boys, s'pose we whitewash the nig. That'll be the jolliest fun out."

He had buried his fingers in Charcoal's hair, and was pulling bard to straighten the tangled wool, not much to the little darky's enjoyment.

"Luf go my hair!" yelled Sam Charcoal. "Luf 'um go, 'fore I bu'st ye!"

His laughing persecutor answered by taking another turn of his fingers in the tangled wool. This was more than flesh and blood could stand. Sam grappled fiercely with the young ruffian, and in a moment they had tumbled into the dirt, where they rolled over and over, pummeling each other savagely. The other boys formed a ring, laughing and screeching, and taking sides with the combatants.

"Give it to him, Patsy! Pelt it into the nigger! Roll his nice red coat in the mud! Give him a jolly good ruffle!"

"Go it, Sambo! Go it Charcoal!" roared the other faction. "Gouge him! Fill his mouth with dust! Ain't they a pair of Kilkenny cats!"

The fight ended in the discomfiture of Sam's assailant. The indignant darky had taken the advice given him, and had crammed a handful of dust into the mouth of the other, so choking him that all the fight was taken out of him. Coal broke loose and raised himself to his feet, his livery so covered with dirt, and his face so streaked with a mixture of milk and dust, that he was hardly recognizable. The other boy crawled to his hands and knees, choking and spluttering.

"Look at Patsy. Look at Patsy!" cried some. "He's eatin' dust just as if he liked it."

"Give it to the nigger! The likes of him comin' to lick white folks! Rattle him, boys! Rattle him!" yelled the freckled ringleader.

"Served him right," roared others. "Let the nigger go."

The young dark, who had been standing in their midst, showing the whites of his eyes as he rolled them around the circle, took advantage of this friendly disposition of some of his tormentors, and made a sudden rush to escape.

The freckle-faced lad who wanted to "rattle him" happened to be in the line of his retreat, and, lowering his head, Charcoal dashed against him with the fury of a wild bull. The young vagabond was struck just amidships, and was doubled up like a jack-knife by the vigor of the assault. He tumbled and rolled on the ground, howling with pain, while his assailant, having made a breach in the lines, darted away at full speed, followed by the yelling boys, who were not content to lose their game so easily.

It was an open lot, in the southern part of the city, where this scene had taken place. The fugitive ran toward the nearest street, in hopes of protection. The mischief-loving vagabonds who had been worrying him followed, yelling to him to stop. It was a sharp chase, but ended in the recapture of the fugitive, a dozen hands closing on his collar, and dragging him back into the midst of his foes.

Charcoal, panting from his exertions, his eyes starting with terror, his face smeared till it was of every color between white and black, presented an extraordinary appearance. He looked so ridiculously absurd that the boys surrounding him shouted with fun.

"Tell you what, fellers," cried one of the crowd, "let's chalk him white! I've got a lump of chalk here. Hold him tight, and we'll make a full-blooded American of him."

Charcoal struggled to escape, but could not break loose from the strong hands which held him. Fettered hand and foot there was nothing but his tongue at liberty, as the young artist began to fresco his face. Wiping off the original coating, he chalked a great variety of lines and figures on the black background, until Charcoal's face became grotesque beyond description.

The prisoner threatened and implored to be let loose, but he might as well have talked to so many Hottentots.

"Turn him this way, till I polish off the left side of his nose.—There, ain't that a beautifier? Now s'pose we make some circles round his right eye. My stars, if he only knowed what a beauty he'll be!"

At this moment Sam managed to get one of his feet free, and he dealt a vicious kick that took the fellow before him in the shins. With a scream of pain the latter loosed his hold. Kicking again to right and left, the boy made a momentary diversion in the ranks of his foes. Partly breaking loose, as they hastily drew back from the well-played battery of his heavy boots, he bent himself half double, and butted his hard head into the mid regions of the youthful artist, who had been so intent on decorating his countenance. The latter doubled himself up, with a howl of pain, and Charcoal had almost escaped again during the moment's confusion among his foes. But several of the older hands firmly held on to him, and his vigorous efforts to escape proved a failure.

"Let's give him a bath in the horse-pond, over at Jones's stables," suggested one of the crew. "He wants the dust washed off his nice coat. Snatch him, boys! Fetch him along!"

Sam fought fiercely against this new indignity. His hands were pinioned, but he used his feet with disastrous freedom. His assailants, however, knew something of the tenderness of a negro's shins and returned his kicks with such good interest that the boy yelled with pain and rage. He had provoked an assault upon the weakest part of his citadel.

"Don't ye do dat now! Oh laws a mercy! Oh, de bressed saints! Lef me go! I ain't done nuffin' to none of you. Oh de laws, I'll go wid ye! What you keep kickin' me fur, when I ain't done nuffin'?"

And Sam danced as if he had been standing barefoot on hot plates, while he broke up these exclamations with yells and groans of pain.

His cries were not quite unheeded. A young lady, who had a minute before made her appearance in a neighboring street, now hurried toward the group of boys from whom the cries proceeded. Her face was full of indignation as she perceived that they had a helpless boy in their midst whom they were tormenting.

In a minute or two more she had come up with the group.

"How dare you?" she cried, "you miserable little cowards!" Her voice was full of indignation.

"Release that boy immediately! If there was a policeman at hand I would have you all arrested."

Some of the vagrants drew hastily back at this indignant command. But two or three of the bolder still held on to Sam Charcoal's shoulder, as if reluctant to give up their prey. But the young lady was evidently a person of energy. She quickly stepped forward, laid her hand on the negro boy's arm, and drew him toward her as she fixed her eyes with commanding indignation on his foes.

"You cruel young ruffians!" she exclaimed. "If you stay here a minute longer I will see if I cannot find some means to repay you for your barbarity."

There was such an impressive dignity in her looks and words that the street vagabonds involuntarily drew back, and gradually retired, as if reluctant to abandon their prey.

Only after they had withdrawn to some distance did the fair rescuer turn her eyes upon the subject of her benevolent effort.

Sam was gazing into her face with a look of deep gratitude, and with some other indefinable meaning in his eyes, which was not easily to be fathomed.

It was all thrown away on her, however. She looked at him for a minute, her face be-

came strangely contorted, smothering sounds were heard in her throat, finally she burst into a merry peal of laughter which she had been vainly seeking to repress.

"Oh! if you knew what an object you are! Forgive me, my boy, but I cannot help it," and she laughed again, more merrily than before.

Nor was her mirth reduced by the grin of response which broke out on Charcoal's begrimed and frescoed face, and which made his strange ornamentation look ten-fold more ridiculous than before.

"They's been a-chalkin' me, missus," he explained, as he rubbed his hand over his face, changing its lines and circles into one expanse of dull white, that was certainly no addition to his beauty.

"For mercy's sake, go somewhere and wash your face," she laughed. "Come with me, my boy. They won't disturb you while in my presence."

The group of young roughs stood at a little distance, viewing with reluctance the loss of their prey, and echoing the involuntary mirth of the young lady with a screech of discordant laughter. Charcoal turned toward them.

"Jess see ef dis nigger don't git his turn!" he ejaculated. "It am nice fun to yank de darky's wool and kick his shins, but I'm gwine to git my fun outen it 'fore de year's ober. Jiss you bet on dat, you miserable loafers!"

He turned again, and followed his fair rescuer, without further notice of the boys.

There was a remarkable grace and beauty in the lithe, swaying form of the girlish person who walked lightly onward in advance of her grateful follower. And her face was no less beautiful than her form. The delicate, well cut features were those of the highest type of blonde beauty, and were full of changeable lights and shades, displaying, under all their softness, something of that energy which she had just so strongly shown.

She was young, perhaps not over eighteen years of age, and had all the bloom belonging to that first prime of womanhood, when the warm life of the girl is just shading off into the fuller but more sedate life of the woman.

Sam Charcoal gazed admiringly on his conductor, and on the sheeny folds of the light silk dress that set so neatly on her well-shaped form. There was a look of peculiar knowingness upon his face that did not seem called forth by the situation.

On gaining the shelter of the street she turned to her sable follower, a smile of amusement again coming into her face as she caught sight of his comical countenance.

"Now you are safe, my boy," she said, in kind accents. "Go wash your face somewhere as soon as possible, and come out in fast colors again, for you do not know how absurd you look."

"You dunno how 'bliged I is, missy," answered Sam, with gratitude. "I jiss wish I'll have a chance to fight fur you sometime, 'coz I'd give all my wool for you. An' I's gwine to pay it back on dem boys, too, as suah as I is Sam, de Premium Darkey."

"You had best keep away from them. They are too many for you. What is your name, do you say?"

"I's got two names, but dey calls me Charcoal more dan any oder—Little Charcoal, for short."

"Little Charcoal, eh? It is more chalk than charcoal just now, I fancy," was the laughing response. "Well, go get washed, and keep clear of such vagabonds in the future."

She walked away, leaving Sam standing and following her with his eyes. She had done her duty in rescuing, and probably in an hour afterward would forget his existence. Not so with the young darky. He had deeper reasons to remember her.

"I didn't give her my t'other name. Didn't tell her I was Sambo," he soliloquized. "S'pose she'd knowed me ef I hadn't been chalked up. Bress me, but little missy has got to be lubly! And to think that she didn't know Sambo, that she played wid when she was a picaninny! Don't catch Sambo forgettin' her. No, sah, or he ain't a Premium Darky no mo'."

He continued to gaze after her until she was lost to sight, and then he turned away in search of the nearest pump.

CHAPTER III.

A FAIR YOUNG CLIENT.

WE must return to the office of Smith & Herring, at a date somewhat earlier than that of our former visit to the domicile of these legal gentlemen. They were, on this occasion, closeted with the young lady whose acquaintance we

made in the last chapter, but who now wore a very different expression of countenance.

In fact, she seemed perplexed and indignant, and one would have said at a glance that some great trouble had come upon her.

"We should be glad to take up your case, if you had one," said Smith, leaning back in his chair, and with his thumbs carelessly inserted in his vest pockets. "But you see, miss, that even a Philadelphia lawyer must have something to work on. Now you seem to have no evidence."

"Will the young lady please repeat her story?" queried Herring. "I did not get the pith of it."

"There is little use," she replied, with offended dignity. "If I have no case that is an end of it."

"Oh, you mustn't mind Smith!" returned Herring briskly. "He does the shadow business for the firm. I do the sunshine. There has got to be somebody to look on the dark side of a case, as well as somebody for the bright side. Why, if you'd bring Smith the full moon he'd swear there was something very doubtful about its light. Let me hear the story, Miss Eldon. "I'll engage that we find a sound case for you."

The young lady had risen and stood as if about to take her departure. But a new look came into her face at this assurance, and she re-seated herself.

"It is not a very long story," she began. "My father died about ten years ago, leaving me his only heir. But his estate was involved, and his will appointed a trustee to settle up his outstanding business, and to act as guardian for me while doing so."

"Your father lived in North Carolina, and was engaged in the turpentine business?"

"Yes, sir," she replied. "And he also owned a plantation."

"What's the name of this trustee?"

"John Hunter."

"Precisely. And a slippery fellow to deal with, too, I fear. I happen to know that same John Hunter. He treated you fairly, you say, until now? Supplied money for your education, and your other needs?"

"He never refused me until last week," she replied, her eyes filling with tears. "Then he rudely told me that he had no money of mine, that the settlement of the estate proved that my father was penniless, and that he had been making me advances out of his own pocket."

"Aha!" exclaimed Smith, suddenly interested. "And did he require you to pay back those advances?"

"Oh no, sir! He said he was willing to lose them for the respect he bore my father."

"Very suspicious! Devilish suspicious! Excuse me, Miss Eldon, but this man is too confoundedly generous. It looks bad. He isn't the kind that brings up young ladies free of expense."

"Then you think he is seeking to rob me of my property?" she nervously asked.

"Why, it looks confoundedly like it. But the evidence, you know—the evidence is the thing. It doesn't matter a fig what we believe. Judges never go by faith. They are queer about proof. What is the evidence that this man has robbed you? That's the point."

"I have none," she hesitatingly answered.

"He has all the papers. There might be some evidence found at Salisbury, in North Carolina, but I have none here."

Mr. Herring shook his head.

"That involves money, Miss Eldon—a great deal of money. And I should judge from what you say that you are not too well supplied with that necessary article."

"He has left me penniless," she replied, with a flush of color in her cheeks. "But I thought—could you not pay yourselves out of the proceeds of a suit?"

"If there are any proceeds."

"Oh, there must be!" she cried, with energy. "I know my father was wealthy. John Hunter has robbed me, gentlemen. He thinks me weak and helpless, and that he can cheat me with impunity."

"But, dear me, Miss Eldon, all this proves nothing. One good piece of evidence would go further in our courts than an ocean of sentimental appeals. We lawyers can't undertake to do business on charity."

"Were you asked to do so, sir?" she indignantly questioned, rising, with a hot color in her face. "I am not here as a beggar, I would have you please remember that."

She walked to the door with a dignified step. Smith and Herring exchanged significant glances. There was something very like a wink

in Herring's right eye. Mr. Smith hastened politely forward to open the door.

"One moment, Miss Eldon," he exclaimed. "You mustn't mind Herring. He is always too plain spoken. He's got a regular Quaker tongue, in fact, and lets out the truth a good deal too easily for a lawyer. You must give us a few days to look into this matter. Of course, if we see anything in it, we will fight for you to the death."

"If you see any money in it for yourselves?"

"I am very much afraid that is the way Herring looks at it," answered Smith with a deep sigh. "He is so very practical. I am a sentimental sort of fellow myself, but I can't do anything with Herring. He's a regular dollar and cent lawyer. Give us a week, Miss Eldon. We want time to hear from Salisbury. If there is any money in it for us there will be some for you."

"And can I do anything in the mean time?"

"Yes. We would like you to call on your guardian and get a plain refusal from him to supply your needs. Get it in writing if you can. You are not of age yet?"

"I am eighteen only."

"Dear me! that is very young for such unpleasant business. Good-day, Miss Eldon. We will be ready to decide in a week."

After a few words more she left the office, very much discouraged by the result of her visit. There was likely to be a long and bitter fight before her.

Clara Eldon had been brought up as the only child of a wealthy parent. After her father's death she had been freely supplied with funds by the trustee of his estate, and had never known want. Therefore, to be now curtly informed that the estate was exhausted, and that no advances could henceforth be given her, was a bitter and unexpected blow. She had fallen from affluence to beggary at a moment's notice, and was as helpless in this condition as it was possible for any one to be. She was dazed, as it were, and overwhelmed by the sudden and undreamed-of stroke of fortune.

On leaving the office she stood for a minute on the door-step, looking with troubled eyes into the street. She failed to perceive a little chap on the pavement close beside her, whose eyes were fixed intently upon her face. In fact, this silent admirer was of so sable a hue that he seemed to make darkness all around him. It was little Charcoal, John Hunter's raven-hued page.

As the boy stood thus intently gazing into the saddened face of the young lady, a hasty step was heard in the hall, and the full face of Mr. Herring made its appearance, as if in great haste.

"Oh, Miss Eldon! Excuse me, but I thought you had gone. By the way, if you should call on John Hunter, do not say anything about engaging Smith & Herring as your lawyers. It's always best not to spring the trap till it is baited, you know. Never put your enemy on his guard."

"Thank you, sir. I will say nothing."

She walked quietly away.

"That's settled, anyhow," said Mr. Herring, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "It's best to see which side has the most money in it, before we tie ourselves. If Hunter would bleed freely, now?"

He turned and walked back, with a look of peculiar rascality upon his face.

Sam pushed out from his covert by the wall, looking very much interested.

"It's little Missy Eldon, suah," he exclaimed. "And they's a-talkin' 'bout Marse Hunter's if he were tryin' to cheat her. Laws a mercy, but things is a-lookin' queer!"

He drew a folded document from his pocket and looked at it intently. It was the paper referred to in our first chapter, and Coal, for some reason, had taken the idea that it had some reference to the young lady he had just seen.

"I's take this to ole Brown, at 606," he continued. "An' ef dar's any blunder 'bout it Marse Hunter's gwine to skin me. Dat's what he said, and I ralely do b'lieve dat man'd as lieve skin a nigger as he would an eel. He's terrible cantankerous."

He continued to gaze at the paper, though his eyes took several excursions around the neighborhood.

"Missy Eldon's 'gaged lawyers yere," he continued. "Ef dis nig could on'y 'ford to make a mistake now, and luf de paper at de wrong place! Oh, de goodness, wouldn't dar be fun in de plantation!"

His eyes at this moment became fixed on the sign of Smith & Herring, with the number of the building near it. This number was 609.

Charcoal continued to look at these figures for some minutes, while a broad grin slowly established itself on his face, puffing out his huge lips till they looked like slices in a watermelon. He suddenly dashed into a breakdown on the pavement, as if filled with glee.

"I's got de idee!" he declared. "I's got de idee! I's gwine to do't an' stan' all de confaberation. But lawsee, won't dar be a rakin' ole time ef Marse Hunter smells de rat. Dis nig'd best git his life insured fust."

Without further hesitation he plunged into the open door of the building in search of Smith & Herring's office.

We have already seen some of the results of Charcoal's resolution, in the keen lawyers' keeping the original of this document, and serving Mr. Brown, John Hunter's lawyer, with a copy. There were destined to be still later results.

We must now go forward a little to record another movement in the legal game. This was the visit of Clara Eldon to her guardian, to demand money, as advised by her counsel.

John Hunter received her in his sitting-room, with all the polite suavity which he could assume when requisite. The illy-repressed indignation of his fair visitor failed to ruffle the smooth equanimity of his demeanor.

"I am very sorry, my dear ward, I am extremely sorry that it has turned out so badly. I have done everything. You do not conceive how I have worked over this matter. Yet I could see years ago, yes, years ago, that your poor father's estate was hopelessly involved. I knew I was advancing my own money, but I could not bear to see you in want in your helpless youth."

"Oh! and I am very helpful now, am I not? You have brought me up to such a useful life! I am so well able to go out and work for my living!" her tones were full of bitter sarcasm. "I certainly should feel deeply grateful to you."

"I have but done my duty," he replied, suavely ignoring her sarcasm. "I do not ask you for gratitude. Of course it is gratifying to find that you appreciate my efforts. As for the money I have advanced, Miss Eldon, I will never require a return of it. I gladly lose that much for the sake of the daughter of my old friend."

There was a look of sanctimonious self-satisfaction on his face that filled her with anger.

"I would sooner starve than keep your money," she bitterly replied. "If I believed it was your money, which I do not, I would beg the means to repay you. Do you intend to advance me the interest of my estate in future, sir, or am I to understand that you intend to deliberately rob me?"

"If you had any estate, my dear Clara, I would be only too happy. As it is—"

"Then you distinctly refuse?"

"I must decline until the orphan's court has passed upon my statement of the account."

"Very well, sir. Then there is nothing further between us. I must look elsewhere for justice."

She walked with a queenly dignity from the room, leaving him with a look of inquietude upon his face. His soft expression disappeared on her departure, and was replaced by a look of cold shrewdness.

"Hang the girl, if I thought she had so much fight in her," he ejaculated. "It is only a flash in the pan, though. I haven't brought her up in a way to give her mental backbone. And as to fighting me without money and without evidence, she does not know much about the constitution of lawyers if she fancies that any of them will touch such a case."

He rubbed his hand with supreme satisfaction. He had sprung his well-devised trap. Had he really caught his game? Any one who had seen the expression of Clara Eldon's face as she left that house might have had doubts. Helpless as he had sought to make her there was a hereditary energy in her nature that was not to be killed out by a false education.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW CHARCOAL GOT EVEN.

"GLAD to see you, Brown. Take a seat and make yourself comfortable. You are looking ridiculously well for a lawyer."

John Hunter pointed his visitor to a chair and continued lazily stretched out in his own. The legal gentleman was a little man with a very grave face, and looked as if he carried all the dignity of the profession on his narrow shoulders. He seated himself deliberately.

"You are not looking so well yourself, Mr. Hunter."

"I should think not. Why, I've been through a regular course of sprouts. Here I am in the hands of the doctor, and that is next door to signing a man's death-warrant. Haven't I just sent my boy out for three different bottles of medicine? and each nasty enough, I'll wager, to make a dog sick. Thank the Lord, there's one way out of it. I can empty the bottles out the window and get well in spite of the doctor."

"No, no, don't do that!" exclaimed Brown, with some energy. "Professional dignity must be considered, sir. You would not insult the doctor's judgment in that way?"

"Stick out for professional dignity even if the patient kicks the bucket, eh? Well, you lawyers and doctors are a blamed queer set, and it's about as dangerous to call in one as the other.—See here, Brown, did Charcoal bring you the paper?"

"Did he? Yes," exclaimed Mr. Brown. "That boy is another of your odd whims. Why, the coal-black little fiend burst like a wild bull into my office, slammed the document down on the table in a way to make me jump out of my boots, and roared out, 'Dar's yer ole paper!' Good heavens, man, why do you keep such a fiend about you?"

Mr. Hunter lay back in his chair and burst into a hearty laugh.

"Isn't he a lump of rascality?" he ejaculated. "He has a perfect genius for mischief and blunders. Why, I can't half enjoy life without that boy. Do you know he made the most absurd blunder in such a simple thing as the taking the document to your office.—But I'll tell you that some other time. What do you think of the statement? That's the question now."

"I have not examined it yet," answered the lawyer, quietly.

"Not examined it? Come, Brown, that's not business."

"But, my dear sir, you must not imagine that your business occupies all my attention. I have some few other fish to fry."

"Oh! hang other people's sturgeons; I want you to attend to my whales first. That is an important affair, my boy."

"No doubt. Everybody's business is the most important in the market.—So you really think the girl means fight?"

"It looks remarkably like it. She comes from an old Revolutionary stock, you know."

But leaving the lawyer and his client to finish their conversation, we will follow the Premium Darky who had been sent to the drug store to get the medicine which the doctor had ordered for his master.

There were three bottles of medicine in all, and Sam listened very gravely to the druggist's directions, as the latter proceeded to label them. The boy's eyes opened wide, as if he felt he was undertaking a weighty responsibility.

"Dis big bottle's to rub on his chest," repeated the messenger, doubtfully. "What de bressed good 'll dat do? 'Sides, Marse Hunter ain't got no chest. I neber see'd none 'bout de house. S'pose he'll hab to rub 'um on his trunk."

"Very well," laughed the druggist. "I fancy the trunk will answer as well. But this is what we mean by the chest, my boy," and he laid a finger on his breast.

"Dat? Now you is foolin'. Dat's on'y a breastpin. Can't see no good nohow, in rubbin' medicine on a breastpin. How's dat gwine to cure de fever-an-ager?"

The druggist continued to laugh, as he put the bottles in Sam's basket.

"Very well. He can take these two bottles internally, according to directions," he remarked.

"Take dem two bottles infernally, 'cording to directions?" repeated Coal more mystified than ever. "See yere, Mister Doctor, you'se pokin' fun at me now, suah. He's to rub de big bottle on de breastpin, and take de two oders infernally, 'cordin' to directions. Dem's mighty cur'us directions, I's a notion. S'pose de doctor oughter know, but dis nig don't 'prove ob de treatment, nohow."

Shaking his head doubtfully, Charcoal left the store, not sure but that he had his master's death-warrant in the shape of those three medicine-bottles. He would have been very well satisfied to make him good and sick, but did not want to quite kill him.

The druggist laughed heartily, as he followed with his eyes the rolling form of the little darky, who was shaking his woolly head ominously as he moved lazily on.

But Sam was not destined to arrive safely home. He had a genius for adventures, and was continually getting into one trouble or another. This often happened from his taking the longest way round, and stopping at every

point where he found anything to interest his vagrant fancy.

On this occasion he followed his usual wandering fashion, and strolled around to a favorite play-ground of the boys, in hopes to find some interesting game of marbles, or some other high-toned amusement in operation.

The place happened just then to be deserted, and Coal seated himself lazily on a rounded stone, as if worn out with his exertions. He rolled his sable countenance from side to side, perhaps in hope of some available mischief.

The opportunity came in the shape of his two foes of a few days before, the ringleader of the gang which had assailed him, and the boy who had frescoed his face with chalk. Sam's eyes glittered, and a broad grin came upon his face, on making this discovery.

"Bound to git even wid dem chaps, you bet on dat," he said to himself, as he cogitated on the best means of revenge.

His eyes fell on his basket, with the medicine bottles, and an idea came to him that set his black face shining like the full moon.

"Laws a massy! won't dat be jolly?" he exclaimed. "I know dem fish. Dey'll bite suah."

The two boys, Teddy and Patsy, to give them the names they usually went by, had just discovered their late victim. They looked at each other significantly.

"There's that haythen nayger ag'in," said Teddy, in a broad brogue. "He butted both on us to'ther day, Patsy."

"Sure an' he did," replied Patsy, rubbing himself suggestively.

"We've got to git even wid the thafe."

Patsy's eyes were fixed attentively on their intended victim. He did not quite understand the young dark's movements. The latter had taken a large bottle from the basket by his side, and was extracting the cork with his teeth. This successfully accomplished he put the bottle to his lips, and seemed to take a long drink from it.

He then wiped his lips with a loud "ah!" of satisfaction, and licked his hand, as if he could not bear to lose a drop of the precious mixture.

He turned quickly on hearing footsteps near him, and hastily replaced the cork in the bottle, with a look of discovered guilt.

"We've cotched you, you dirty thafe!" cried Teddy, with glee. "So you've been sent to the store, and yer puttin' the bottle in yer black naygur's mouth?"

"Won't his boss make him skip whin we post him 'bout this?" suggested Patsy.

"I ain't done nuffin'. I were on'y a-smellin' to see if it was spiled," cried Charcoal, in well-assumed alarm.

"Can't put that down our throats, nig," exclaimed Patsy. "We see'd you drink it."

"Drink med'cine?" cried Sam, with a forced laugh. "S'pose I's fond of med'cine?"

"Won't go down, nig. We see'd you. Got to gi'n us a drink, or we'll blow on you."

"Go way now! Ef Marse Hunter notices it, he'll sw'ar it's all me. Jiss don't you tech it, or I'll bu'st ye."

Teddy, during this talk had slipped around Sam, and now seized the large bottle from the basket, and held it up in triumph.

"I've got it, Patsy! I've got it!" he cried in glee. "We'll have a drink too, as well as the nayger."

"Luf dat alone!" exclaimed Charcoal, in well-counterfeited anger. "I'll tell Marse Hunter ef you tech dat bottle."

"So'll we tell him," retorted Patsy. "We'll tell him that we see'd his nigger drinkin' out of it. Take your swig, Teddy. I'll kape the darky off."

Sam had risen to his feet, but Patsy stood threateningly before him, with doubled fists, while the other young vagrant seated himself, pulled the cork from the bottle, and prepared to enjoy the stolen sweets, as they fancied they had seen Charcoal enjoy it.

The angry look on the latter's face concealed a secret glee in his heart, as he saw Teddy lift the bottle to his lips, with a contemptuous wink at his foe.

"Don't you take more nur half," cried Patsy, in some alarm. "I want my sheer. I bet it's good, the way the nigger licked his fingers."

Teddy made no answer, for the contents of the bottle were just then gurgling into his mouth. An instant more and there was a great change in the state of affairs.

He jerked the bottle hastily from his lips, with a yell of pain and dread.

"Oh Lord! I'm p'isened! I'm p'isened! The nayger has p'isened me! Oh the blessed mercy! Punch his head, Patsy. He's p'isened me."

He sprung wildly to his feet, and flung the

bottle from him, while he clapped both hands on his stomach, and ran off with wild leaps, screaming at every jump:

"I'm p'isened! I'm p'isened!"

The Premium Darky, his shiny face distorted with laughter, sprung for the bottle, which happily had landed upright.

"Dar's one's had his rations," he grinned. "Now fur de oder."

Patsy stood stupidly looking after his flying comrade, whose yells were now growing fainter in the distance. He failed to perceive the movements of Coal, until the latter slyly caught him by the collar, and with a quick jerk and a skillful trip, extended him on the broad of his back. In an instant more he was a fast prisoner, Charcoal kneeling on him in such a way as to confine his arms and legs.

"You an' Teddy Hogan played it on de little nig to'ther day. It am de nig's turn now. Teddy's had his drink ob 'lasses an' honey, and I's gwine to gib you your drink."

"Oh, don't! Oh, you'll p'isen me, like you did Teddy! Oh! help, help!"

But threats and prayers and cries for help were alike thrown away on the dark. With his black face in a broad grin of delight he deliberately proceeded to carry out his mischievous design.

Inserting a stick between Patsy's teeth, during one of his yells for help he prevented him from closing his mouth, and proceeded coolly to pour the nauseous compound down his captive's throat.

"De doctor wouldn't send it to Marse Hunter ef it were p'isen," remarked Sam. "But I guess it aren't berry nice. Am dat enuf, or does de little feller want some more?"

Patsy could not answer. He was choking, spluttering and groaning to such an extent as to alarm his grinning foe. Charcoal hastened to set him free, with the remark:

"Guess he don't like 'lasses an' honey! Good-by, little boy. Come 'round ag'in when you want somefin' nice."

Patsy sprung to his feet, contorting his face and body as if he had swallowed liquid fire, and uttering fierce threats of revenge on his grinning foe.

"Oh Lord! water! water!" he shouted. "I'm burning up! I'm all afire inside!"

He set out at full speed in the footsteps of Teddy, his eyes starting, and the tongue hanging from his mouth.

"Wonder ef dey won't luf de nigger lone arter dis?" queried Coal. "Ef dey don't I'll gib 'em some more 'lasses an' honey."

He turned to his medicine-bottle, at which he looked with some alarm.

"Lawsee, dey's took half ob it! Marse Hunter 'll raise a lubly row ef he misses it. Bress my eyes. I's got to do somefin' or de Premium Darky's gone up!"

A happy thought suggested itself at that moment. The largest of the other two bottles was filled with a liquid of the same color as that in the open bottle. He might average the contents of the two bottles, and thus conceal the considerable loss from the larger bottle.

Without a moment's further consideration Charcoal proceeded to put this design into execution. He pulled the cork from the smaller bottle and emptied a portion of its contents into the other. Then holding both bottles up he took a survey of their respective conditions.

"Guess I got too much dat time," he said, shutting one eye to observe better. "Better pour some back to square up de bottles. Won't neber do for marse to find out."

He continued to pour back and forward until he had got the contents of the bottles to his fancy. But by this time he had made a neat mixture of the liniment and the medicine, and there was a strong chance of fun in the Hunter household when the invalid came to swallow the Premium Darky's mixture.

But unconscious of any impending mischief Coal corked up the bottles and deposited them in his basket with immense satisfaction.

"Dar, dat's to de p'int. Marse Hunter 'll neber find out dat dere's been any 'sturbance."

He took up the basket, and walked home with a perfectly contented conscience.

CHAPTER V.

A VERY PECULIAR ACCIDENT.

CLARA ELTON, considerably downcast by the result of her interview with John Hunter, yet now doubly resolved to fight for the estate of which she was sure she was being robbed, had called again at Smith & Herring's office to report progress.

"He plainly intends to set me adrift," she

mused. "It may be as he says; the estate may be exhausted; but, I do not believe it. Yet I am left utterly penniless. I must find some means to make myself a living. He knows this. He knows that I will be unable to pay legal fees, and thinks that I will not have the courage to fight him. He imagines that he has a safe opening to rob a helpless orphan."

"Why, it looks like it," admitted Smith. "Take a seat, Miss Eldon. You must be tired."

"Not at all, sir. Besides, you gentlemen gave me to understand that you could not take up my case without a fee, or without strong evidence in my favor. Now I have neither to furnish you, so I must wait for time to aid me, and must look elsewhere for counsel."

She walked in her stately way toward the door. She had not forgotten or forgiven their cool reception of her former advances.

Smith looked at Herring. There was a significant expression upon his face, as he pointed to the poor girl, seemingly without a friend in the world.

"She's quick as lightning on the trigger," he whispered. "Bring her back, Herring. But keep mum about that document."

"Excuse me, Miss Eldon," exclaimed Herring, advancing with a great show of concern. "Why, you must not take our little professional pleasantries for earnest. We should be very much put out, indeed, if you were to employ other counsel after applying to us. Of course we will take up your case, and trust to luck for payment."

She turned quickly to the speaker.

"Oh, sir! But that is asking too much of you."

"Not at all. Not at all. We lawyers have got souls, Miss Eldon. We are not quite dried-up law briefs inside, as some folks would make out. Give the matter into our hands, and I warrant we squeeze John Hunter."

"And trust for your fee to the successful termination of the suit?" she asked, with caution.

"Certainly, certainly!" cried Smith. "But we promise to bleed you then; to bleed you finely," he laughingly continued. "You will find us cormorants of the worst type. You know we are taking a big risk, and will very likely get nothing."

"Don't mind him, Miss Eldon," continued Herring. "His bark is worse than his bite."

"I shall be willing to pay well if you are successful," she returned.

"Oh, of course! But we'll not bleed you too badly. Do take a seat. I have twenty questions to ask you before we can go into this thing intelligently."

Despite their odd manners Smith and Herring were shrewd lawyers, and at once began to lay the foundations for the case they had taken, by a series of questions bearing upon the former life of their fair client, and of her recollections of her father's affairs.

But she had been too young at his death to have any useful remembrance, and was able to give them no information of special importance.

While this conversation was taking place, a conference bearing on the same question, was being held at the office of Mr. Brown, on the opposite side of the street. John Hunter, his client, was seated in a chair facing the lawyer, a serious look on his face.

"You find the documents of importance, then?" he asked.

"I should say so," answered Mr. Brown, with unusual energy for him. "If it comes into court it will require some very awkward explanations. Very awkward indeed, I fear."

"And suppose those explanations are not forthcoming?"

"Then John Hunter may find himself in a tight place."

"Suppose it does not come into court?"

A look of deep cunning came into Mr. Brown's face. Evidently his sense of honor did not go deep.

"It might prove dangerous to withhold it," he cautioned. "Our opponents might know of its existence."

Mr. Hunter took a cigar from his pocket, and quietly bit off the end.

"You don't object to smoking, Brown?"

"No. Not at all."

"Have you that document handy?" he asked, as he lit a match.

"Yes, it is here." He extracted a folded paper from the heap before him and passed it over to his client.

The latter partly unfolded it, and glanced carelessly at the signature.

"Yes, that's it," he said, proceeding to light his cigar.

This done he, in a careless fashion, held the

corner of the paper to the flame of the match. In a moment it had kindled and was blazing.

"So you think it would be a dangerous article to keep in the house, eh, Brown?"

"What are you doing?" exclaimed Mr. Brown, starting from his chair. "You must not destroy that paper in my office! It is a penal offense to destroy that paper!"

"Eh!" exclaimed Mr. Hunter, with a show of surprise. "Why, bless me! the thing has caught fire. That's very awkward indeed. Have you any water handy, Brown? We must put it out."

He sprung up, holding the paper upright, with the burning end downward, so that the flames shot up toward his hand.

"It will be burnt before we can find any water," he cried, running across the floor in such a way as to create a wind, which helped the consumption of the paper.

By this time the flames had reached his hand, and he flung down the paper in the grate that occupied one wall of the room.

"It's too confounded unlucky!" he ejaculated. "But it was an accident, Brown. You must bear me out it was an accident."

"Cannot you save the remainder?" asked Brown, with a funny look in his little eyes. "Something might be made of it, you know."

"You don't want me to burn my fingers I hope? Of course we must make every proper effort to save it; but no one is required to set himself on fire."

He seized the tongs and made several wild efforts to take up the burning fragment of the paper. But he only succeeded in placing it in a better position for the flames to consume it more rapidly.

"I am afraid it is doomed," he said, laying down the tongs with a sigh. "It was the most incomprehensible accident. How did I ever set it on fire, Brown? And then it was so unaccountable that you had not a drop of water handy."

"You might have thrown it down and stamped out the fire," suggested Brown.

"True enough. Strange I did not think of that. Why didn't you speak?"

"The whole thing was too sudden," replied Brown, with his cunning look.

"Very true. It has gone anyhow, and I sadly fear the Eldon estate may suffer. But I did all I could to save it. You know that, Brown. Have a cigar, eh? You'd best join me in a smoke."

"Why, I won't mind," answered Brown.

And the two precious villains lay back behind their cigars, as if quite oblivious of the fact that they had just committed a rascally and unlawful act.

They might not have felt so comfortable, however, nor the smoke have curled so neatly upward, if they had been aware of the fact that they had destroyed only a copy of the document, and that the original lay closely locked in Smith & Herring's safe. John Hunter's haste had prevented his perceiving that he held only a skillfully made copy of the document.

After a smoke, and a conference of some length, in which the subject of the burned document was not even alluded to, Mr. Brown's client prepared to return home, his business being concluded.

"You see, I've been feeling confoundedly blue of late," he remarked. "A sort of chills and fever. This is one of my off days, but it shakes me like sin sometimes."

"Have you been taking medicine?"

"No. I hate the rascally stuff. I've got two or three messes, made up by Dr. Bolus, nasty enough I suppose to set a dog's teeth on edge. I have been looking at them these two days, trying to screw up my courage to attack them."

"Come, come, that won't do," exclaimed the little lawyer, shaking his head in violent disapproval. "You will never get well if you neglect your medicine. Come, promise me you will take it."

"Ugh! I suppose I will have to," groaned Mr. Hunter. "I'll uncork the stuff when I get home, and if I can muster up courage, down it goes.—Good-day, friend Brown. Pray for me."

With a loud laugh Hunter left the office. A half-hour afterward found him at home. Charcoal answered his peal at the bell.

"Ha! Blackjack, you're here, eh? It's very kind of you to be in at this time of day," was the sarcastic greeting to the boy.

Nor was it misapplied, for Charcoal had a way of his own of disappearing often when most wanted.

"Where did you put that medicine you brought in from the druggist's?"

"De med'cine?" answered Charcoal, his eyes opening. "Why, I put 'um on de floor, in de basket."

"The deuce you did! And what floor, you jackanapes?"

"Under de table, in de office."

"Go get it, then, and bring it into the sitting-room. I want to sample it."

He walked away, while Charcoal went somewhat reluctantly for the bottles. The possible effects of his manipulation of the drugs began to trouble his young mind. He had got the contents of the bottles evenly averaged, but it just struck him that the mixtures might not be just those which the doctor intended. The fate of Teddy and Patsy troubled him.

"What are you loitering about, you sable hound?" roared his master, as Charcoal came gingerly forward with the bottles. "Bring them here.—Bless my eyes, Dr. Bolus don't want me to swallow all that, I hope. I'll be hanged if I do, then!"

"Dis is to rub on de trunk, so de 'pothecary said," answered Charcoal.

"On the trunk! What does the fool mean?" snatching the bottle. "Oh! it's a liniment, eh? To rub on the chest, not on the trunk, you donkey. Thank the stars I don't have to swallow it. Let me see the others."

Charcoal held them out at the full length of his arm, holding back as if afraid they might explode, while his eyes rolled in anticipation of a coming cyclone.

But without noticing this strange behavior of the boy, his master took the two bottles and looked at their labels.

"A teaspoonful in a glass of water, to be taken just before the chill," he read on the smaller. "Well, that doesn't come in to-day, at any rate. Let us see the other."

The directions on the other bottle were, "A tablespoonful every three hours."

"All right. I've got to break ground somewhere. Bring me a tablespoon, Charcoal."

The boy obeyed, and returned with the spoon, though with unusual hesitation.

"What ails you, you little devil? Fetch it here, I say!" roared his master, who had by this time extracted the cork of the bottle.

He jerked the spoon from the reluctant hand of the boy, who immediately retreated to the wall, where he stood with protruded tongue and starting eyes, watching every movement of his master with extraordinary interest.

"I suppose it's bad policy to sip it," remarked Mr. Hunter, holding up the filled spoon. "The sooner it's down the sooner the confounded business is over, so here goes."

He put the spoon to his lips, and with one gulp swallowed its contents. At the same instant a deep groan came from Charcoal, as if he could no longer restrain his feelings.

The effect of the draught was remarkable. The invalid stood for a single instant as if not quite sure whether he had swallowed honey or gunpowder. Then a sudden contortion came upon his face, while a yell of agony issued from his lips.

Clapping both hands on his stomach, he writhed and twisted as though he had swallowed liquid fire, while Charcoal stood looking on with a growing grin on his mischievous face.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, fire and brimstone!" yelled the writhing man. "I've poured a whole blazing volcano down my throat. Water! water! Some one bring me a bucket of ice-water. I'm all afire inside!"

These cries were followed by a volley of curses deep enough to make the skies turn blue, while he continued doubled up in agony.

"Ha! you grinning villain, have you anything to do with this?" he shouted, on catching a glimpse of Charcoal's face, on which enjoyment of the scene had taken the place of its original dread. "You infernal black-jawed imp of darkness, you'll laugh at me, will you? Take that! And that! And that!"

As he spoke he caught up one bottle of the medicine after another, and hurled them with a sure aim at Charcoal's head. They broke on his thick skull, and their parti-colored contents came streaming in rivulets over his black face, giving him a most grotesque appearance.

"And that!"

The spoon followed the medicine.

Fearing that it might be succeeded by a chair the boy made a mad break for the door, and dashed headlong from the room, from which there followed him a perfect volley of groans, yells and curses, as though a host of demons were holding high carnival there.

Charcoal made the best of his way from the locality, quite satisfied with his first effort at drug mixture.

CHAPTER VI.

A LIVELY DINNER PARTY.

"It is a most extraordinary thing," said Dr. Bolus to another gentleman, as they stood together in the drawing-room of John Hunter's residence. "He swears I tried to poison him. Why, the medicine I ordered the man was as mild as a May morning. The druggist must have made some awkward blunder, for he vows that he swallowed a dose of pure dynamite."

"They say he threatens to cowhide the druggist," laughed the other. "I'd like to be by and see it. It would be royal fun to see old Laudanum dancing among his drugs."

"I wonder if he has taken some of the liniment by mistake," queried Dr. Bolus. "If he did he might well fancy there had been a fire kindled inside him."

"Hush! here he comes."

At that moment John Hunter entered, dressed in party costume, and with a smile of welcome on his face.

"Good-day, gentlemen, I am glad to see you. I'd sooner see you socially than professionally, friend Bolus, after that pleasant experience you put me through. Hang it, your treatment was rather too heroic. But I haven't felt any sign of a chill since. You quite burnt them out of me."

"Here's some blunder," answered Bolus. "The medicine I ordered would not have made a child squirm."

"Old Laudanum swears he put the prescription up correctly," returned Mr. Hunter.

"Was that under compulsion?"

"Oh no! I only threatened to crack his bald pate, and to break every bottle in his store. But there was no compulsion."

"You have queer ideas about compulsion," laughed the third gentleman. "But could anybody else have made the trouble? Who else handled the medicines?"

"Nobody but my aid-de-camp; a rascally little nigger we call Charcoal. And by Jove, the boy did act queer," he exclaimed, with a start of remembrance. "If he's been playing a trick on me, hang me if I don't murder him."

At this moment Charcoal entered, with a half-frightened look on his face as he gazed at his master.

"Dar's some gemmen down-stairs axin' fur you, Marse Hunter," he announced.

"Show them up.—But see here, Charcoal, I've caught you at some of your old tricks. What did you do to that medicine when you brought it from the drug-store?"

The boy's face might have grown pale if it had not been of such midnight blackness. His knees trembled, and his utterance became stammering.

"Fore de Lord, I didn't do nuffin' wid 'um, massa! I brung 'um square home, jiss 'cordin' to d'rections."

"You didn't put anything in them?"

"I didn't fotch nuffin' 'ept what de 'pothecary guv me. Dat dar's de Gospel trufe."

"Hang you you black-snouted rogue, you lie. I can smell the lie all through you. I'll find it out yet, blast you; and if I do I'll pull out your toe-nails one by one.—Off with you now, and show those gentlemen up."

Charcoal was glad to escape. But there was a broad grin on his face when he got outside the door.

"I didn't put nuffin' in de bottles," he soliloquized. "But I'm desp'rat' afeard I kinder mixed t'ings up. Oh, Lawsee, isn't it fun?" and he doubled himself up on the stairs, while his black face shook with suppressed laughter.

The gentlemen who had just come were followed by several others, until a party of some size had assembled. In fact, it was a dinner party of his gentlemen friends to which John Hunter had invited these guests, and others whom he yet expected.

He had all the Southern hospitality, and made them welcome with profuse demonstrations.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Jones. The same hearty fellow as ever, eh?—Thomson, my good fellow, how wags the world with you?—How d'ye do, Brown? You're here without a brief to-day, but you're brief enough yourself to answer. You can appoint these gentlemen a jury on the cold meats; Jackson, there, can be judge of the champagne, and you can advocate the claims of the roast venison. So you'll be at home, you see.—Welcome, Masters. You're late, but the day is young yet. You can make up for lost time."

At this juncture dinner was announced, and the party filed into the dining-room, where a most appetizing repast was prepared.

A lively conversation followed their discussion of the first course. During this discourse,

Charcoal, who was installed as one of the attendants, entered with a large roast of beef on an immense dish. He carried it gingerly before him, his tongue protruding as he fixed his eyes anxiously on his charge, and planted one foot after the other with the greatest caution.

"What is this I hear about something in the shape of a joke?" called one of the guests across the table. "How is this, Mr. Hunter? Folks say that old Laudanum, the druggist, has been dosing you."

"Not much," answered the host. "It was that confounded nigger boy of mine. Hang his black skin, I'll pepper him well for it yet."

At the commencement of this remark Charcoal had taken his eyes from his charge to fix them upon his master. As the latter went on, the boy's knees began to shake, and the plate took a dangerous slant downward. Unseen by him the smoking roast slid nearer and nearer to the edge of the dish, until, just as Mr. Hunter ceased speaking, it came with a heavy thud to the floor, followed by a stream of red gravy.

All eyes turned hastily upon the boy, who stood trembling, his face a picture of terror, while he held the dish extended before him with his eyes fixed in utter bewilderment upon its empty surface.

"Devil take me!" cried the host, furiously rising. "This is too much of a joke. Why, you sable-tinted son of Satan—"

He did not get further in his speech, for at this moment the dish slipped from Charcoal's unnerved fingers and dropped with a loud crash to the floor, splintering into fifty pieces.

"De laws bress us!" ejaculated the boy, with a deep groan of horror.

In a moment he turned, and made a headlong dash for the door, followed by his master, who was foaming with fury.

"Hoicks! Hoicks! Stole away! Stole away!" cried one of the guests, an old fox-hunter.

"After them, gentlemen! After them! Let's be in at the death."

They all sprung to their feet, with shouts of laughter, and made for the door, through which the chase had disappeared.

But the next room was empty, and only a distant roar, mixed with frequent oaths, told the direction which the pursuit had taken.

In a few minutes Mr. Hunter returned, somewhat calmed by his violent exercise.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he exclaimed. "But a saint could not have stood that in quiet; and I'm not much of a saint."

"Did you catch him?" asked one of the laughing guests.

"Catch him! no. You could catch a weasel as easily. The rascally young Hottentot, I have several scores to settle with him! Pray be seated, gentlemen. I will have the ruins removed, and I fancy we can make a dinner yet."

A waiter came in and removed the remains of Charcoal's unlucky venture, while a rattling conversation, not unmingled with a good deal of sly laughter went on around the table.

Other dishes were brought in, and dinner recommenced, the rattle of knives and forks replacing the hum of conversation as the guests devoted themselves to the main purpose of their assembly, leaving the lighter duty of talk until they had taken off the first sharp edge of appetite.

While this progress was being made in the dining-room other matters of interest were taking place in the kitchen.

This locality was tenanted by the cook, a fat-faced, good-natured Virginia negress, and a young colored fellow, who was aiding her in the mysteries of the dinner.

Charcoal poked his woolly head in at the crack of the half-open door, and looked cautiously about.

"Ole marse ain't yere, eh?" he asked, in a loud whisper.

"Now you git out, you ugly little rat, or I'll shy a bone at yer head!" cried the cook's assistant.

"Ain't yer 'shamed to show yer nose yere, arter what ye've done?" indignantly asked the cook.

"Fore de goodness, I couldn't help 'um," asserted Charcoal, pushing into the kitchen, with a broad grin on his shining countenance. "De laws! ye neber see'd such fun. If Marse Hunter 'd grabbed me den, wouldn't I cotched it! You bet de little nig did stampe de."

"How come you to drop the meat?"

"He skeered me, dat's why," answered Charcoal confidently. "He said I put sumfin' in de med'cine, an' de laws knows I didn't do nuffin' ob de kind."

"You done somethin' to 'em, you scape-grace," cried the cook.

Charcoal seated himself on a chair, and laughed till his sides ached.

"Dey kinder got mixed," he admitted. "Dar was one med'cine dat war to be rubbed on de trunk, or de breast-pin, one or t'oder. Dunno what de bress'd good it war to do. Toder war to be took infernally, 'cordin' to d'rections. Dat's what de druggist said. I tole ole marse dat, but I's 'feared de two bottles got mixed."

He continued to laugh at his recollection of the striking effects of his operation.

"I knowed it war some of your tricks, Charcoal," laughed the cook, who had no objection to a joke that was not played on herself. "You oughter have your ears cropped, you little villain. Hand me the salt there."

The grinning boy picked up the huge salt-cellar, and started across the kitchen.

"Hold this a minute," said the cook's attendant, handing him the cover of an ice-cream can. "I want to see if it is hard enough."

Charcoal, confused by the number of his commissions, held the cover at arm's length in one direction, while the hand that held the salt-cellar hung immediately over the open can. The young man was looking for his wooden spoon, with which to try the cream.

"Hurry up there, little lazy-foot!" cried the cook sharply. "Are you going to keep me all day waiting for that salt?"

At this sharp appeal Charcoal started so suddenly as to spill half the contents of the salt-cellar in the ice-cream can. Unconscious of what he had done, he hastened across to the irate mistress of the kitchen, while the young man proceeded to stir up the cream, quite unconscious that it had received an addition to its ingredients.

"What have you done with the salt? I thought that was full," cried the cook.

Charcoal gazed into it innocently.

"Bressed if I knows," he ejaculated.

Meanwhile the young man had mixed his cream thoroughly, and replaced the lid of the can, saying with a satisfied air:

"There, that's ready anyhow. It'll be as hard as ice by the time they want it. You don't catch me making any blunders, like Charcoal here."

"Yes, it am all Charcoal," exclaimed that worthy, indignantly. "Charcoal done dis, an' Charcoal done dat, an' Charcoal done eberty'ng dat's out o' gear. I's gittin' 'bout tired of it. Dar's no use layin' all the blame on Charcoal. I ain't no wuss nor half de oders."

"All right, pickaninny," said the cook benignantly. "Never mind, little one."

"I ain't done nuffin' else, anyhow," declared the boy. "An' I couldn't help spillin' de meat."

He seated himself in the blissful belief that his skirts were clear of any further trouble, and that the course of his life was bound to flow smoothly for the rest of that day.

But there's many a slip between the cup and the lip, as Charcoal was destined to find out.

The dinner continued to progress until it reached the dessert, when Charcoal, much against his will, was sent into the dining-room to help clear and reset the table. He gazed askance at his master while doing so, ready to drop all and run if he saw a hostile movement.

But the host contented himself with scowling, and Charcoal was allowed to proceed in peace. In a few minutes the dessert, consisting of puddings, ices, and various other tempting viands, was brought in and arranged, and the waiters prepared to help the expectant guests.

There were some wry faces as several of them tasted their ice cream. In most cases it was pushed aside without a second taste, and the guests devoted themselves to other viands.

Mr. Hunter looked hospitably after the comfort of his guests.

"Come, Mr. Brown, you're not eating anything," he exclaimed. "Try the ice cream. It's a warm day, and you need something to cool you."

Mr. Brown ventured upon another spoonful and then pushed aside his saucer.

"I am not as fond of cream as I once was," he remarked. "I will try your peach pie instead. That's one of my special weaknesses."

"Well, you're not so cold-blooded, Masters. Come, you will find it prime."

Mr. Masters dipped the spoon into his saucer, and swallowed a mouthful of the chilly mixture. He said nothing, but his face expressed anything but gratification.

"What's wrong?" cried Mr. Hunter suspiciously, glancing around the table, until his eyes fell upon Charcoal, who stood in supreme satisfaction that his skirts were clear this time.

But an involuntary tremor ran through him at this threatening gaze.

"Bring me some of that cream," commanded the host.

He took up a brimming spoonful, and put it into his mouth. The next instant he ejected it again, with a look of disgust.

"Salt as Lot's wife, by thunder!" he ejaculated. "No wonder you are all making sour faces over it. Ha, Charcoal! stand there, you villain!" The boy had been slyly edging toward the door. "So this is another of your tricks, eh?"

A suppressed laughter was going the round of the table.

"Fore de bressed saints, Marse Hunter, it warn't Charcoal dis time! Sure's you lib I had nuffin' whateber to do wid de cream."

"How's this, Joe?" asked the host, turning to the young man who had charge of the cream. "Is this your work?"

"Not much," answered Joe, a light of remembrance breaking into his eyes. "I recollect now, Charcoal stood over the can with a dish of salt in his hand while I had my back turned. He must have dropped it in then."

"Then, by the seven blessed pipers, he shall swallow every ounce of it, if it chokes him!" and the irate master of the feast made another dash at his mischievous servant, too furious to think of the demands of decorum.

Charcoal, who had been edging toward the door, now slipped out, and the chase was renewed, more vigorously than before.

The guests sat laughing around the table, until Joe, who had followed the chase, returned to the room, his face full of anxiety.

"Won't some of you gemmen go the kitchen?" he asked. "Mr. Hunter has cotched Charcoal, and is ramming the ice cream down his throat. Dar'll be murder if it goes on."

The laughing guests hastened to respond, and found the irate host in the kitchen, with Charcoal extended helplessly on his back, while he was pressing the freezing mixture by great spoonfuls into his mouth, the boy choking and yelling at every opportunity, while his furious master was cursing like a demon.

"Let him go," cried the laughing guests. "You will choke him to death."

But the maddened host would not desist till he was pulled by force from his helpless prisoner who had been served with a greater feast of ice cream than he had ever been lucky enough to receive before.

It was a little too much, in fact, to judge by Charcoal's movements, for he sprung to his feet as soon as released, and made wildly for the back door of the kitchen, his eyes starting out like milky balls, and his face an ashy hue with fright.

Nor was his speed lessened by the furious oaths which followed his flight from the lips of his irate master.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE LAW.

SEVERAL weeks have passed since the date of our last chapter. These weeks have brought little change in the circumstances surrounding our characters. Clara Eldon is still with the friend whom she had been visiting at the date of the opening of our story, but the marked difference in her fortunes has given her a very uneasy feeling. It was perfectly in rule to pay a long visit when she felt that she had the means of returning the favor; but now it began to look like charity; and she was eager to leave and take her chances in the battle of life.

But what she was to do she knew not. She had been brought up in utter helplessness so far as any useful knowledge was concerned. Not that she was lacking in energy; but even energy must have some path in which to act.

Her friend was aware of the change in her fortunes. But she was a whole-souled woman, and made her welcome all the warmer for this knowledge. She begged Clara to stay with her until her suit was decided, and was sure that it must go in her favor.

To this Clara strongly objected. She must do something to make a living for herself. But what? There was the rub. When there is a dozen trained persons fighting for every opening there is very little chance left for the untrained.

"It is confoundedly heartless in John Hunter," said Smith to Herring, as those two worthies were seated in their office debating the case of their new client, "to turn that young girl adrift without a moment's notice. Bless me, if I wouldn't like a chance to cowhide the scoundrel. To bring her up as helpless as a baby, keep her supplied with abundance of cash, and then suddenly tighten the purse strings and

send her adrift upon the world without a penny. Hang him, I believe I will cowhide him!"

"Keep cool now, my boy," answered Herring. "It is all in the way of business. For my part, I rather admire Hunter's game."

"The deuce you do!"

"Yes. There is nothing like tactics. The man has a scheme of robbery. We admit that. Very well. Is he to supply her with cash to fight him, or educate her so as to develop the fight that is born in her? Would any lawyer do that, Smith?"

"But he isn't a lawyer."

"He is rascally enough to be one, at any rate."

"I'd be sorry to be half as great a rascal, if I am a lawyer," answered Smith.

"But look here, my good fellow," returned Herring. "We are honest lawyers, of course; but don't you see that the girl hasn't a case worth a farthing? We have tried Salisbury and the other North Carolina records, and have not found an ounce of favorable evidence. We are on the losing horse, Smith. We have been fools enough to take a job that has neither money nor reputation in it."

"But the statement of old Eldon's properties, which fell so luckily into our hands? The western lands which he values there at a cool fifty thousand?"

"Where are they?" interrupted Herring. "We have not found a particle of evidence to substantiate that paper. And they may be anywhere from Chicago to Hong Kong, for all that statement tells. I tell you what, Smith, it is not worth the paper it is written on to us. But—"

"But what?"

"It may be worth something to John Hunter," with a very sly wink.

"Hillo! is that your game? You want to sell out to the enemy?"

"I want a fee for the respectable legal firm of Smith & Herring," was the cool answer. "If we can't get one from the plaintiff, there's nothing for it but to try the defendant. Sentiment is a very fine thing, my boy. But cash is better."

"Will he bite, do you think?" asked Smith, quite forgetting his virtuous indignation of a few minutes before.

"Bite? Yes. If it is worth nothing to us, it is worth a good deal to him. He burnt our copy, you know, for I found a fragment of it in Brown's grate. He can burn the original, too, if he buys it first."

"It will not do to be hasty," answered Smith, very anxious for a fee, yet not quite liking this rascally plot. "Suppose we feel him first. We may get on the track of these mysterious lands."

"Yes, if you had a fool to deal with. But John Hunter isn't of that kind."

"Then let us investigate the West further."

"Why, bless you, Smith, we can't give a lifetime, and beggar ourselves in postage-stamps, on a wild-goose chase. We have tried all the most likely places now, and there's no record of property in the name of Eldon. It's narrowed down to question of fee or no fee. Now what do you say? There's cash in this document," and he struck his hand on the paper which Charcoal had left there.

"I think you'd best go investigate John Hunter," acknowledged Smith, with a sigh, as if it hurt him a little to bid good-bye to his honesty.

"I knew you'd come to it. We can do nothing for the girl. But we may do something for Smith & Herring."

And the two precious villains continued to debate their scheme to treacherously sell out the last hope of the innocent client, who had trusted her fortune to their perilous care.

On the other side of the street, in the office of their opponent, Mr. Brown, his client, John Hunter, was seated in an earnest conversation on the same subject.

The lawyer seemed a little vexed with his client, for some cause, and was speaking to him very sharply.

"I owe you no thanks, John Hunter, for burning that paper in my office. Respectable lawyers are not expected to countenance dubious operations of that sort."

"Hang it all, what was I to do? Keep it, to rise like a ghost against me?"

"Do you not keep matches at home?" asked the lawyer, frigidly. "I told you what I thought of the document. But I do not like bonfires of that sort in my office."

"Oh, I see!" cried Hunter, with a low whistle. "You don't object to the devil; but you want him to hide his horns in your presence."

It was plain, indeed, that Mr. Brown's hon-

esty, like that of his neighbors across the street, was only skin deep. The bolder villain, his client, felt a contempt for this weak villainy.

"What am I to do, then? Shall I make a bonfire at home? There are other papers which it might not be agreeable to have produced in court."

Mr. Brown looked up, with a twinkle in his cunning little eyes.

"I believe, from what you told me before, that you have lately sold some property in the west," he remarked.

"Just so," answered Hunter, laughing. "Realized very handsomely, too. And what is more I gave a clear title."

"As trustee for the estate of Harry Eldon?"

"Don't ask too many inconvenient questions, my friend," Hunter laughingly replied. "I don't like bonfires in my office."

"But you have some papers connected with these sales?"

"Exactly. And the question is, what am I to do with them."

"Don't burn them in my office," answered Mr. Brown, with his slyest look.

"I see, I see," cried Hunter, continuing to laugh. "You can kick the old boy as much as you please, but don't kick him till I've got my eyes shut. Blessed are they who know nothing, for they cannot give evidence. You're a brick, Brown. Can't you come up and see me some time soon? I would like to treat you to a show of fireworks."

"I don't like your fireworks," answered Mr. Brown, with a shake of his little head. "You had better keep them private. And—and don't leave a scrap to rise in testimony against you."

Mr. Hunter laughed more heartily than ever.

"You're a brick, Brown. A perfect brick. Good-bye, and take care not to get wet feet. There's rheumatism about."

Giving the lawyer a hearty slap on the shoulders, the jovial client left the office, much to the satisfaction of little Mr. Brown, who did not quite fancy such boisterous villains. He preferred to shut his eyes when any rascality was afloat, and keep his hands as clean of villainy as any respectable lawyer could.

"A sly little hound, that fellow Brown," cried Mr. Hunter, to himself, on regaining his office at home. "Hang the slippery little rogue, I feel sometimes like catching him between my two hands, and squeezing him till the lies pop out of him like so many bubbles. The rascal would sell his mother for a shilling, and yet he goes around prating of honesty till he sickens one."

With a loud "Ugh!" of disgust Mr. Hunter began a searching examination of his papers, carefully laying aside certain documents, and stuffing the others back into the pigeon holes of his desk.

He was preparing to carry out the slyly given advice of his lawyer, and to burn all dangerous papers.

"There is nothing like clearing one's ship of all doubtful freight before going into action," he muttered, as he continued this investigation.

At this moment there came a sharp knock at the door. With a look of alarm and vexation, Mr. Hunter snatched off his hat, and clapped it down on the heap of papers which he had sorted out. As he did so one of them fell on the floor, unnoticed by him.

"Who is there?" he called out.

"It's on'y me," answered a well-known voice, and the door partly opened, revealing the sable visage of Charcoal.

"Come in, you crow. What are you standing there for? What do you want?"

"Dar's a gemman down-stairs, wants to see you, sah."

"Did he give his name?"

"He's a lawyer, sah. Yere's his card."

"Silas Herring," read Mr. Hunter. "I never saw the man. What does he want with me? Show him up, Charcoal.—But stop a moment."

He removed his hat and gathering up the small heap of assorted papers, he shoved them into an empty drawer of the desk. While he did so Charcoal stood near him, shuffling his feet uneasily upon the floor.

"What's all that noise about, you dusky vagabond? Have you got the St. Vitus' dance? Off with you, and show the gentleman up."

Charcoal shuffled his way to the door, with none of his usual alacrity of movement.

But he was no sooner outside, and the door closed behind him, than he broke into a silent laugh that made his round face look like the full moon.

"Cotched 'um dat time. Bet I cotched 'um dat time!" he chuckled to himself, when out of ear-shot of the office. "Dat's what comes ob

havin' a crack in de nigger's shoe. Dar's some t'ings mighty handy, jiss you b'lieve."

The adroit little rogue, in fact, had worked the paper, which John Hunter had carelessly dropped on the floor, into an open crack in the sole of his shoe. This was the cause of the shuffling movement which had so annoyed his master. He stooped and seized the captured document, laughing more broadly still, as he consigned it to his pocket.

"Dar's somefin' in it, I rarely does b'lieve," he said to himself. "'Coz dat lawyer ain't come yere for nuffin'. He's gwine to go back on Missy Clara, or dis nig don't know nuffin' 'bout lawyers."

Having made his capture, Charcoal proceeded on his mission, and ushered the visitor up-stairs, to Mr. Hunter's office.

"Take a seat, glad to see you," said that individual, in his hearty Southern way.

"But you do not know me, eh?"

"Why, I have not that honor."

"I am Mr. Herring, of the law firm of Smith & Herring, plaintiff's counsel in a civil suit brought by one Clara Eldon against one John Hunter."

"The deuce you are!" cried Hunter, in great surprise. "And what in the name of all the saints, do you want here?"

"Only a little conference, that may prove for the advantage of both parties."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Hunter, with a wink.

"There's nothing like feeling your way."

"We thought, perhaps, you would let us into some evidence of which we are short."

"You did, eh?" in surprise.

"For instance, there was a statement of Mr. Eldon's investments, which you unluckily set fire to in Mr. Brown's office, and—"

"What in the blue blazes do you mean?" roared Hunter, springing in consternation to his feet. "Has that idiot Brown—"

"I only mean that you made the little error of burning a copy, while the original happens to be yet in existence."

The discovered villain dashed his hand against his forehead. He looked wildly at the lawyer.

"Where is your office?" he asked, with a sudden thought.

"At 609 Walnut street."

"Then, by all that's good, it's that black villain Charcoal again! I'll murder that boy, as sure as you're sitting there."

Charcoal, who had his ear to the keyhole at that moment, trembled down to his boots.

"A bad move may be set right by a good move," said the lawyer significantly.

"Ha, do you mean—"

"That every document has its price? Yes."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TABLES TURNED ON CHARCOAL.

"I's bound to fine out what's in dat dokyment, or bu'st," said Charcoal to himself, as he rolled in his peculiar walk along the street. "Sure's ye lib, Missy Clara is gwine to git in trubbel. Ef dar eber was a big rascal it's dat cod-fishy lawyer as calls hisself Herrin'. But ef I don't catch him on a hook yit, it'll be queer."

The indignant boy walked slowly on, anxiously investigating the numbers of the houses, as if in search of some special locality.

"Dar's lawyer Jackson somewhar 'long yere, as I used to brack boots fur," he muttered. "He tole me den, ef I eber had any legal bizness to come to his office. I's got legal bizness now, sure's you lib; and I's gwine to hab it put squar' through."

He was so intent upon his object that he failed to perceive on the other side of the street his two sworn enemies, Teddy and Patsy, whom he had so neatly tricked with the liniment.

"Kape shady, me boy," cautioned Teddy. "It's that haythen nayger. Sure and I'm burnin' inside yet from that fire and brimstone he made us swaller. Are ye contint to be put on that way?"

"Nary time," answered Patsy.

"Nor me nayther. I'll not enjoy life ag'in till I pay him back."

"Let's kape an eye on him," returned Patsy. "Look at the imperdant thafe, goin' intil that big house beyant, as proud as if he owned it!"

"He's got to come out ag'in," said Teddy significantly.

Charcoal had, in fact, found the number he wanted in a large building which had once been a stylish private residence, but was now divided up into lawyers' and conveyancers' offices.

In a few minutes he knocked at the door of an office on the second floor.

"Come in," cried the occupant.

This gentleman, a large, gray-whiskered,

jovial-faced personage, stared on seeing the face of his visitor, with its midnight complexion and its odd look of bashfulness.

"Hillo! what queer sort of importation is this?" and the startled attorney pushed back his chair, and gazed with wide-open eyes upon his visitor.

"It am on'y me, Charcoal, as used ter brack yer boots," explained the boy. "Ye ain't fer-got little Charcoal, Marse Jackson?"

"Oh, it's you is it, you black scapegrace? I recollect; you cheated me out of a dime your last job. You can give me a black-up this morning in payment," and he stretched out a pair of well-soiled shoes toward the boy.

"I ain't in dat line now," remarked Charcoal with offended dignity. "I's been promoted since you seed me, Marse Jackson. I's gem-man's boy now; took to livin' out."

"You are, eh? By Jove, yes, he's in livery. And a neat idea of livery that, too. Such a fine contrast of colors.—Well, Charcoal, what's afoot? What can I do for you?"

"I's got legal bizness, Marse Jackson."

"Legal bizness!" and the lawyer laughed heartily at the boy's consequential tone. "Why, you are blossoming early, my boy. Take a seat, Charcoal. Take off your hat. Let me hear your case," and the speaker gravely took pen and paper, as if prepared to jot down notes of his new client's statement.

"Dar's a big bit ob rascality goin' on," began Charcoal. "An dar's a lawyer in it who am de biggest rascal ob de two. But I's gwine ter counter-march on 'em, I is."

"Come, come, Charcoal, nothing against the lawyers, if you don't want me to throw you out of the window."

Charcoal started back at this assumed fierceness of tone.

"I knows dey are berry honest folks, Marse Jackson. But dis one's a brack sheep. Dar neber were a big flock dat didn't hab one brack sheep."

"All right," laughed Mr. Jackson; "we will admit the one black sheep."

"I's got a dokyment yere as I wants you berry partik'lar to git yer eye on. You tole me, Marse Jackson, dat whenever I had any legal bizness I were to come you."

"Did I?" queried the lawyer. "Very well then. Let me see your document."

Charcoal cautiously extracted, from some deep pocket in his clothes a closely folded paper. As he did so he rolled his eyes carefully around the room, as if in dread of some witness to his mysterious business. But all was serene; there were no other eyes there than the laughing ones of the lawyer; and Charcoal handed him the paper with a look of deep importance.

"Dar's de dokyment," he ejaculated. "Dar's rascality somewhar in dat paper, an' I wants you to find it out."

Mr. Jackson unfolded the paper, and cast his eyes quickly over it, while Charcoal watched him with anxious interest, his eyes starting and his thick lips working, while a perspiration broke out on his black skin. He certainly deemed the present moment one of vast importance.

"There is nothing in this," said the lawyer. "It is only a conveyancer's bill for the sale of some property in Peoria, Illinois. Where did you get it? And what does it mean?"

"Dat dar dokyment means rascality," remarked Charcoal, with mysterious earnestness.

"Who sold that property, Marse Jackson?"

"Why, let me see. John Hunter, trustee."

"An' ain't ole Marse Eldon's name dere?"

"No."

Charcoal shook his head doubtfully.

"It oughter be dere. Dar's rascality, suah. Jiss you freeze onto dat dokyment, 'cause it am berry 'portant. I's gwine to look fuder."

Charcoal took his hat and prepared to depart.

"Hold up there, you confoundedly mysterious darky!" cried the lawyer. "Suppose you let me a little deeper into this secret. Who's my client? What's the case? What does it all mean, anyhow? I don't fancy buying a pig in a bag."

At this energetic appeal Charcoal returned, and gave the lawyer an inkling of what he was driving at. To tell the truth, he had a very vague idea of the matter himself, but he had overheard some important parts of the conversation between his master and the treacherous lawyer, and he was very sure that there was "rascality somewhar."

"Dey is plottin' to rob Missy Clara," he concluded. "An' I's gwine to stop 'em, ef a little nig ob my size kin do't. I'll fotch her yere, Marse Jackson, 'cause I wants you to see her."

Dar ain't sich a lubly little lady dis side ob Georgy."

It was with a feeling of intense satisfaction that Charcoal found himself in the street again. He was sure he had done some very important work for Miss Clara, though he had a very vague idea of what that work amounted to. But he had overheard enough to know that the "dokyment" was important.

He failed to notice that he was followed, at no great distance, by his arch enemies, Teddy and Patsy, eagerly looking out for some opportunity of revenge upon him.

In fact Charcoal was not just then in the mood for observation. He had been through a great mental excitement, and a drowsy sensation now followed it.

He had not gone very far before he felt sleep overcoming him, and his pace lagged, as he drowsily remarked:

"Dunno what makes me so berry tired. Guess I'll squat down somewhar an' take a rest. It am a lazy sort ob day, I's suah ob dat."

A convenient corner offered itself near the entrance of a narrow court, and Charcoal lazily curled himself up on the pavement, with very little heed to the effect upon his livery.

It was not two minutes before he was sound asleep, and dreaming of how neatly he was going to trick "old Marse Hunter."

And it was not two minutes more before Teddy and Patsy made their appearance. The sleeping boy was at their mercy.

They looked at one another with knowing winks, while their faces were convulsed with suppressed laughter.

"Sure, the nayger's asleep," whispered Teddy.

"Faith an' he is. An' there's the n'atest chance for fun yit," returned Patsy.

"Let's initiate the dirty haythen," remarked Teddy, his mischievous eyes sparkling.

"Ain't I wid ye?" answered Patsy, clapping his knee in glee. "What's it to be, me boy? I wish we had a bottle of hoss med'cine."

The young vagabonds formed themselves into a committee of two, to devise ways and means to repay their sleeping foe for the trick which he had played upon them.

For the next fifteen or twenty minutes they were busy as bees about the slumbering boy, moving very cautiously so as not to awaken him. But Charcoal was not one of your sleepers who waken at a torch. A loud clap of thunder would have been no more to him than the noise of a fly's wing when he set himself to sleep in earnest. So his round, fat, dusky face remained in midnight unconsciousness that he was being made the victim of a trick, and he did not even stir when moved into another position.

But at the end of that time there was a sudden ending of his dreams. His mischievous foes had blown an ounce of Scotch snuff up his wide nostrils, and a sudden and irresistible desire to sneeze came upon him. Sneeze after sneeze, like successive thunder-claps, broke on the air, startling the passers by, and effectually rousing Charcoal out of his snooze.

But his awakening was hastened by another cause. For suddenly behind him came the sharp, ripping sound of fire-crackers, rapidly increasing, as a whole pack of these noisy inventions took fire.

Not knowing what it was, and thoroughly frightened, Charcoal sprung wildly to his feet, while the crackers, attached to his coat-tail, fizzed, sputtered, and cracked worse than ever, in a regular fanfaronade of uproar.

"Oh, de laws! Oh, de bressed goodness!" yelled the terror-stricken boy. "Oh, de marcy! What's dat?"

He started to run, but he had not taken two steps before he was brought up all of a sudden. Both feet and hands were tied by short cords to a fastening in the wall behind him, just leaving him play for a few steps.

But Charcoal was quite oblivious of the cause of the difficulty, and continued his vigorous efforts to run, while the rattling noise kept up behind him.

The spectators, whom this sudden uproar had gathered, were beside themselves with laughter. It was very funny, indeed, to see the little darky, with his face almost blanched white with terror, his thick lips protruding, his eyes starting from his head, and snorts and yells of fear issuing from his mouth, while he kept up the most ridiculous dance imaginable. He was trying to run, and perhaps fancied he was running, but every movement of hand and foot was jerked back by the rope that held it, so that his run was converted into a sort of horn-pipe that would have made an anchorite laugh.

Such a comical picture of terror has not often been seen, and it was added to by the fact that Charcoal's attire was very oddly tricked out; a circle of feathers in his hat, and streamers of colored rags depending from every part of his clothing.

The authors of this mischief rolled on the pavement in laughter, while the crackers continued to explode and Charcoal to dance, snort and yell.

"Oh de mighty marcy! It's de debil! It's de debil suah, dat's arter de little nig! Oh, de bressed saints! Cotch 'um! Cotch 'um, somebody!"

By this time the crackers had sputtered their last, but the boy's terror continued, and on a benevolent bystander stepping forward and cutting the cords, he started off in a wild flight, still yelling as if he thought that old Satan was after him indeed.

The laughter of the lookers-on continued, while the two authors of the mischief, together with all the other boys present, started off in full pursuit of the flying fugitive, bent to get some more fun yet out of him.

But Charcoal was winged by fright; his pursuers were checked by laughter; the consequence was that they were soon distanced in the chase, Charcoal leaving them quite out of sight as he darted around corner after corner.

But he had run a full mile ere he came to a pause through sheer exhaustion, and not sure yet but that his Satanic Majesty was close upon his heels.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARCOAL MAKES A CALL.

CLARA ELDON's friend lived in a very pretty mansion on West Spruce street, Philadelphia. It was neatly and tastefully furnished, and the sitting-room, which the family usually occupied, was a charming apartment.

Clara and her friend, Miss Jennie Mason, with two or three other lady friends, were assembled in this room, at about the same time that Charcoal was running away from his tormentors, as told in the last chapter.

"It was such a pleasant home," said Clara, in answer to a question from one of the visitors. "We lived near Salisbury, but our house was so delightfully situated, and was so charming in every respect, that it is no wonder my childhood was a very pleasant one."

"Was your father in business in Salisbury?"

"Yes. But he also had other important interests. There was a plantation attached to our house. And he was interested in the turpentine business in the North Carolina woods. I only remember him as being full of business, for he died while I was quite young."

"And your pleasant home has passed away from their family?"

"Yes," answered Clara briefly, as if not wishing to pursue the subject.

"The truth is," remarked Jennie, "that her father's will left all his property in trust with a supposed friend, named John Hunter, who has turned out to be a great rascal, and is trying to cheat poor Clara out of her whole estate."

"Now do not say that," answered Clara quickly. "We only suspect that. We are not sure of it."

"I would be, then," said Jennie, with much energy. "I would make him prove his case thoroughly."

"So I shall," replied Clara. "But I fear that his trickery has been too deep. We can find no evidence against him."

"That is too bad," rejoined the young lady visitor. "To be robbed of such a delightful home, and of all your wealth by the devices of a rascal. Can you think of nothing in your early life that will serve to show the character of this man?"

"Oh, no! I hardly knew him then. I was scarcely ten years old when my dear father died and left me alone in the world. There was nobody on the plantation except my aunt, who came to live with me, and the negroes."

"Were there many of them?"

"Yes, quite a number. Some of them I was much attached to, for they were very kind old souls. And there was one comical little fellow who was almost my only playmate. He was several years younger than me, and served me, I fancy, in place of a doll."

"Well, I hardly think I should have liked that. A living black doll!"

"He was certainly black enough. A pure, unadulterated, midnight complexion. Poor little Sambo, I have often wondered whatever became of him."

"I suppose he is a full-grown and frightfully ugly negro now," laughed Jennie.

"No, no, I hardly can bring myself to think that. He is not more than fifteen years old. I would give much to see poor little Sambo again."

"Yere he am, Missy Clara! Yere he am! Dis is de identercal nig!"

The eyes of the young ladies turned quickly to the door, and they sprung to their feet with cries of alarm at sight of the object which they saw there.

In fact, it was a most extraordinary vision, and quite enough to frighten the average young lady half out of her wits. For there stood Charcoal—or Sambo, to give him his original name—but it was Charcoal in a very odd disguise. The additions to his costume which Teddy and Patsy had made were still there. Above the top of his low-crowned hat waved a circle of long feathers, as though he were an Indian chief. Attached to his clothes were long streamers of colored rags, dirty enough to have been fished out of an ash barrel. To his coat tail still hung the remnant of the pack of fire-crackers. And the terror through which he had lately passed still left its mark upon his face, in bulging lips and starting eyes.

Altogether he was an astonishing spectacle to burst suddenly upon a party of nervous young ladies, and it is no wonder that they sprung to their feet with cries of dismay.

"Oh, what is it? Oh, take the thing away!" came in a startling chorus.

"Who is he?" asked Jennie, who had preserved her senses better. "Do you know this miraculous scarecrow, Clara?"

"I?" exclaimed Clara. "I know him? Why, he must be an escaped lunatic."

"Why, Missy Clara, suah ye ain't fergot?" cried the boy in a deeply hurt tone. "Why, I's dat Sambo. I's little Charcoal, as de white folks calls me now. I's de little nig as you used to play wid when I were a little pickaninny on de plantation."

Clara continued to gaze at him, recollection slowly returning to her. The other young ladies, who had got over their fright, burst into a chorus of laughter at his ludicrous appearance.

"Mercy on us, Clara; you don't mean to say that this funny-looking creature was your old playmate?"

A flash came into Clara's eyes. She made no reply to this remark, but continued to observe Charcoal.

Are you not the boy that I rescued from some young vagabonds a few weeks ago?"

"I's dat dar boy," answered Charcoal, solemnly. "I knowed you den, Missy Clara; but you didn't know me, so I kept mum."

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed, taking him by the arm, and looking close into his face. "I do believe it is Sambo, truly. But what do you mean by this masquerade? Why have you bedizened yourself with feathers and colored rags? Is that your idea of a costume in which to visit your old mistress?"

Charcoal looked down upon himself and gave a start of surprise.

"De goodness gracious, Missy Clara, I neber knowed all dem t'ings was on me! An' de marcy knows how dey eber come dar!" exclaimed Charcoal, as he tugged vigorously away at his strange ornaments. "Ye neber see'd sich a conflagration as I's been frew; but I was suah it were all a dream."

As he spoke he continued to tear off the streaming rags that gave him so odd an appearance, and with which his tormentors had plentifully ornamented him.

"I sot down on de pavement, and I s'pose I must 'a' got asleep," continued the boy. "I don't s'pect nobody neber had sich a dream. Dar was fire all around me; and cannon balls; and bomb-shells. And it were t'underin' and light'nin' like mad. An' de more I tried to run away from it de more I couldn't. I ralely do b'liebe de Ole Nick were in it, for you neber did hear de like."

By the time he had got through with his explanation Charcoal had divested himself of most of his ornaments, and began to look like himself again.

"And is that part of your dream?" asked Jennie, laughingly.

"I fess dat I dunno whar dey come from," acknowledged Charcoal. "Maybe I war—what dey call 'um?—a somnambuler, or sumfin' ob dat sort. Anyhow, when I waked up, yere I was, right out in de street 'fore dis house. So's I wanted to see Missy Clara I took de 'sponsibility ob comin' in."

"I verily believe it is Sambo," said Clara, who had continued to curiously observe him. "And I am very glad to see him again. But I never thought there could be such a change

from the tumbling little black baby I used to play with. But where have you been all these years, Sambo? And where do you live now?"

"Whar's I been, an' whar does I lib now?" repeated Charcoal, his face beaming with delight at being recognized by his old playmate. "Suah I's been libin' most ob de time since wid Marse Hunter; and I's libin' dar yet."

Clara started violently on receiving this information. But Jennie sprung forward with a quick thought kindling her face.

"You live with Mr. Hunter? With Miss Clara's guardian?"

"Dat's de identercal trufe," repeated Charcoal solemnly.

"Then you may know all about him. He is trying to rob your old friend of her fortune. Can you not help her? Can you not find out something?"

"Dat's what I'm yere fur to-day," answered Charcoal importantly. "I's found out lots. Jiss lots, now I tells ye. Marse Hunter's a big rascal. An' dat codfishy lawyer as calls hisself Herrin', he's anoder big rascal."

"Herrin'!" exclaimed Clara, quickly, "of Smith & Herrin'?"

"Dat's 'um, Missy Clara. Jiss you leab de nig to smell a rat. He's sellin' you out to Marse Hunter. He's foun' a paper which Marse Hunter's gwine to gib him five hundred dollars fur, squar' on de nail."

"Good heavens!" cried the poor girl, wringing her hands in dismay. "Even the lawyers I have engaged have turned against me, then! What shall I do? I must charge them with this treachery."

"Not too fast," broke in Jennie. "The boy has something yet to say."

"Don't you neber do it, Missy Clara," exclaimed Charcoal earnestly. "Jiss luf 'em go on. Neber let on as you know. Charcoal's gwine to work for you, an' I's got sumfin' now ob 'portance; ob great 'portance suah."

"What is it?" asked Clara, anxiously.

"Marse Hunter's a big rascal, dat's what," returned Charcoal, his black face beaming with delight and importance. "He gin me a paper to tote to Mr. Brown, but I toted it to Smith & Herrin', coz I knowed dey was your lawyers. Well, dat rascal Herrin', what does dat feller do but tote de paper back an' sell it to ole Marse Hunter? De little darky heered 'um, Missy Clara. He heered 'um right frew. It war sumfin' 'bout property 'way out West, dat nobody knowed 'bout 'cept Marse Hunter. But maybe de little nig don't know? Maybe Charcoal don't know?"

The boy was so full of delight at his discoveries that he was quite unable to go on, but burst into a regular plantation hoedown on the floor, to the renewed alarm of the young lady visitors, who had not quite got over their first fright at Charcoal's appearance.

"Jiss you come wid me, Missy Clara," cried Charcoal, as he continued his excited capers. "I's got a lawyer 'gaged. Fust chop, too. None ob yer codfish rascals like dat Herrin'. You come wid me. I's took him a berry 'portant dokymet; bery 'portant indeed! He's gwine to work fur you, coz he tole me he'd do all my legal bizness; and dis am de very fust bizness I eber took him. Come straight away, Missy Clara, 'coz de time's goin'."

After some further debate Clara consented to accompany Charcoal, though she was not quite sure yet for what purpose, for the boy's explanations were not very satisfactory. But if he really lived with John Hunter, and had found something in her favor, it would not do to let the chance go unimproved.

It was with a feeling of great pride that Charcoal escorted his former mistress through the streets, and finally introduced her into the office of Samuel Jackson, Attorney at Law.

This gentleman was seated at his desk, and looked up with surprise on seeing his late visitor so quickly returned, and with much interest as he caught sight of the pretty face of the young lady.

He hastened to provide her with a seat, and politely asked the purpose of her visit.

"The boy here can best explain it," she quietly answered. "I have come here to please him, though I hardly know for what purpose. He said something about an important paper."

"Yes," answered Mr. Jackson, "he left me a paper. It may be of value, though I do not understand in what way. It is only a conveyancer's bill, for the sale of some property in Peoria, Illinois, sold by John Hunter, trustee."

"Trustee for whom?" she quickly asked.

"The paper does not say."

"Trustee for Missy Clara Eldon!" cried Charcoal, his face working with excitement.

"Didn't I tell ye it was 'portant, berry 'portant? Dat ole rascal Marse Hunter is a gwine to rob you, Missy Clara. But he's got to keep shy ob de little nig."

Mr. Jackson opened his eyes at this exclamation from the boy. Clara, too, began to see the possibility of some importance in Charcoal's discovery, though the boy himself had nothing more than a vague idea that the paper was "berry 'portant."

The attorney asked a number of questions, in order to gain some knowledge of the character of the case of his fair client. He finally requested her to give him a statement of the whole business, and explain the grounds on which she wished to bring suit against John Hunter.

This she did, briefly but clearly, putting him in possession of the main details of the case.

"It looks bad," he said, shaking his head doubtfully. "I fancy this man is trying to victimize you as you suspect. Have you applied to no counsel before?"

"Yes, sir. To the legal firm of Smith & Herring."

Mr. Jackson whistled.

"Excuse me," he said. "But they are not of the best odor. Smith, I think, is honestly inclined; but I would not advise you to trust Herring."

"Dat one am a big rascal!" exclaimed Charcoal, unable to keep silent any longer. "I cotched 'um. De little nig am sleepy sometimes, but he cotched 'um."

At Mr. Jackson's questioning, Charcoal explained what he meant, and the conference ended by the attorney consenting to act as private counsel for her, and to look up the evidence in her case; while he advised her not to let Smith & Herring perceive that she suspected them.

CHAPTER X.

CHARCOAL HELPS DINAH.

"WHAR'S you been all dis time? Dat's what I wants to know," asked the cook of Mr. Hunter's establishment. "You's got no bizness to be off caterwaulin' 'bout de city, 'thout nobody knowin' whar."

Charcoal, to whom this question was addressed, sat demurely shelling peas, with a broad tin basin beside him, a plate in his lap, and a basket on the other side in which to throw the empty pods. Dinah, the cook, was a very orderly person, and did not believe in making any unnecessary litter.

"I ain't been nowhar," answered Charcoal, indignantly. "De little nig's got to hab some exumcise. Ain't gwine to stay in de house all de time."

"It won't hurt you," growled Dinah. "Aren't I in de house all de time? An' I reckon I ain't none de worse for 't. Yer a deal too grumtious, boy, and it'd sarve you right to gib you a slatherin' 'bout de ears. Yere's Mr. Hunter raisin' de roof off 'bout you. An' it's all Dinah. Dinah oughtn't to let ye gone out. Good Laws! I'd as lieve try to hold a weasel."

"Wish ye'd luf me 'lone," grumbled Charcoal. "How's I eber gwine to git dese peas done if you keeps a-growlin' like dat? Guess Marse Hunter 'd best tie me to his coat-tail, an' den he'd allers hab me. Don't git no good ob my life, nohow, 'bout yere. It's allers, 'You lazy nigger,' and 'you brack debil Charcoal,' an' de like. Wonder if ebeybody t'inks little nigs ain't got no feelin's, like grown folks?"

Charcoal shelled the peas faster than ever, as he grew indignant at his bad treatment.

"Yer a lazy young rascal. You know you are," persisted Dinah, as she took up a stirring stick to test her cooking. "It's been a good six hours since a soul's see'd ye 'bout de house. You's been wid them low-down Irish boys, as you ought to be 'shamed of yerself to 'sociate wid. S'pose I don't know? Yer a disgrace to de fam'ly as brung ye up, to keep sich comp'ny."

"Dat's not so, Mom Dinah," replied Charcoal. "I don't hab nuffin' to do wid 'em. But I ain't a bit 'shamed ob 'em. I reckon an Irishman's as good as a nigger any day, if he 'haves hisself."

This was a little too much for Dinah's temper. Hadn't the Irish come over here and invaded the kitchens of the Americans, and pushed out the black help head and shoulders? The idea of anybody who had been under her training going over to the enemy in that way! She stepped impulsively forward with the stirring stick which she yet held, and brought it down a whack on Charcoal's shoulders, crying spitefully:

"Take dat, you little rascalion vagabond, as 'd go back on yer own color dat way!"

Her blow was more effective than she intended. Charcoal had been half doubled up, with his feet on the chair-round, intent over his peas. He made a very natural start forward at this unlooked-for reminder, and his feet being entangled, he quite overbalanced himself. A quick effort with both hands to save himself overturned the pan of pods and the basket of shells, and the next instant he toppled over face-foremost on the floor, while a loud crash and the rolling of minute green balls in all directions, told the fate of his plateful of shelled peas. Dinah's blow had certainly produced an astonishing effect.

"De debil take de pickaninny!" cried Dinah, holding up her hands in dismay. "Dar goes one ob de bestest chiny plates, as I tole him neber to touch. An' sich a redic'lous scatteration ob peas! Ef I war a saint—which I isn't—I b'lieve it'd make me swear."

She fell on Charcoal, who was struggling in a bewildered fashion to his feet, and repeated the dose with interest. The boy finally broke away and ran to the kitchen door.

"Wish you'd luf me 'lone!" he cried angrily. "S'pose you t'ink de nig's made ob cast iron. Weren't my fault ef de peas was spilt. You'd 'a' broke Charcoal's nose, suah, ef it stuck out like white folks'. Why, you most made me jump outen my boots."

He felt his nose gingerly to see if it was still there. But fortunately for him it was too flat to hit the ground first, and the shock of his fall had come upon his thick skull bone, that was strong enough to stand a much harder blow.

"It's ebey bit yer own fault, a-talkin' so ridick'lous!" cried Dinah. "You neber had no sense nohow. Come yere now, and pick up dese peas. S'pose I's got nothin' to do but walk arter your heels."

"You'll luf me 'lone if I does?" queried Charcoal doubtfully.

"Sartin I will. If I tetched ye ag'in, ye'd be runnin' yer woolly head in de chiny closet, or butting a hole through de flour barrel. Yer de most onsartin nigger I eber see'd, Charcoal."

The boy laughed till he showed all the teeth in his head, his double row of white ivory standing out in startling contrast to his black skin.

"Ye oughtn't to neber hit de nigger behind his back," he remarked, as he began picking up the spilled peas. "He's ticklish dar, I tells you dat. 'Tain't fair, anyway, when a feller's got hisself tangled up, and a plate ob peas in his lap."

He was quickly gathering the peas into a pan as he spoke, the dish being broken into a multitude of fragments. These he gathered up, with a doleful expression, when Dinah was looking at him, but a broad grin when her face was turned away.

"Dar's more ob 'em to be shelled," remarked Charcoal, on his return after disposing of the fragments. "Is I to finish 'em?"

"Don't ye tech 'em!" cried Dinah angrily. "Dar's no trustin' sich a boy. You'll be a-bustin' somethin' else. I'd as lieve trust an egg in yer coat pocket as gib you anoder plate. Git out, now, I'll finish 'em myself."

Charcoal was very well satisfied with the arrangement, and was making his way with a grin to the kitchen door, when he was checked by Dinah's commanding voice:

"Come yere," she demanded. "Dere's somethin' ye can do. Mr. Hunter's been burnin' somethin' in de stove in his room. De saints knows what fur. Guess he don't want a fire to warm his shins dis time o' year. Burnin' some ole papers, I s'pose. Anyhow, I can't stan' to hab de stoves choked up wid ashes. Jiss you take de ash-pan an' brush, and go up an' clean out de stove. An' don't you make no dust, boy, 'cause if you does I'll wallop you, sure. Away wid you now, 'fore Mr. Hunter gits back, 'cause he don't like to hab nobody meddlin' 'round his room when he's at home."

Charcoal hastened to obey, and made his way, with pan and brush, toward Mr. Hunter's office, on the second floor of the house. The boy could not help thinking that there was something suspicious about this fire, after the discoveries he had already made. He muttered to himself as he slowly ascended the stairs.

"Didn't I see Marse Hunter, wid my own eyes, a-sortin' out papers; an' cotched one ob 'em, too, wid de toe ob my shoe? What's dat fur, I'd like to know? He's been a-burnin' de dock'ments 'bout Missy Clara's property. De big rascal! I wish I'd stole dem all, 'stead ob one. Wouldn't lawyer Jackson made him squeal, if he'd got all dat bunch? Hoopee! ye'd best b'lieve it!"

By this time Charcoal had reached the room

and was ready to investigate the contents of the stove. He had hoped to find some unburnt paper there, but his disappointed eyes saw only white ashes.

He thrust in his arm and raked the ashes carefully from the top of the heap. To his surprise and delight a show of brownish white paper was visible below. Still raking off the ashes he revealed a little bunch of half-burned papers, whose edges were charred and scorched, but whose central portions seemed to have escaped the fire.

Evidently the papers had been crammed into the stove, and set fire to from above, the stove door being then shut and they left to burn. But a fire burning downward is very apt to go out. The ashes from above choke the fire below; and in the present case this particular clump of papers had been so tightly massed together that the flames had failed to consume them. The fact that they had not burnt did not appear from above, where only white ashes were visible.

But Charcoal did not trouble himself with all these reasonings. Here was a prize which might be valuable, and he did not care much how his careless master had come to leave it there, so long as he had done so.

"I's rarely a notion dar's luck for de nig after all," cried the boy, so excited that he broke into a breakdown, making his heavy shoes rattle on the uncarpeted floor. "T'ou't Marse Hunter was a sharp 'un, but he shet him eyes dat time, suah."

"What you doin' up dere, eh?" came in the sharp voice of Dinah from below. "Want me to tote de stick up dere ag'in? Dar's some mischief afloat. I knows it."

"Dar's nuffin'," cried Charcoal. "I on'y drapped my shoes on de floor. It's all 'cause Marse Hunter won't hab no carpet in de office. I's a-cleanin' out de stove."

"Hurry up, den. Don't be all day 'bout it," and the angry lady of the kitchen strode back to her domain.

"Forgot to say dat my feet was in dem shoes," chuckled the boy as he returned to his task. "Guess I'd best git dis job done, 'cause Marse Hunter mought drap in yere next."

His first movement was to extract the bunch of scorched papers from the stove and rub off their burnt edges into the ash pan. What to do with them was the next question. After a minute's reflection he left the room and ran nimbly up-stairs to his own apartment in the sky-parlor, where he carefully concealed his prize.

The boy was whistling a lively melody when he returned. He felt that he had gained a ten-strike upon his villainous master. He began the task of cleaning out the remaining ashes from the stove, still whistling glibly.

He was so intent, indeed, that he failed to hear a step behind him, and was only aware of the presence of company when the toe of a boot gave him a gentle reminder from behind, and the voice of his master angrily exclaimed:

"What are you doing here," you inq. of the old boy? Who told you to meddle about that stove?"

A quick sense of dread shot through Charcoal. But it was followed by confidence when he remembered that his prize was safely hidden.

"I's on'y a-cleanin' out de stove," he replied, with great innocence.

"And who, in the blue blazes, asked you to bother yourself with the stove?" There was a ring of suspicion in the voice of the speaker. "You're not generally so confoundedly eager for work."

"It were Mom Dinah, in de kitchen," returned Charcoal indignantly. "She said dar were ashes in your stove, and she neber could b'ar ashes. An' she tole me to fotch de ash-pan an' brush, and come right up yere, an' clean it out. 'Tain't no fun to git kicked fer 'beyin' orders, Marse Hunter. I weren't wantin' to do it."

"I'll wager high on that," cried his master, with an oath. "Anyhow, you get kicked often enough for not obeying orders, so this will help to strike a balance. Come, get out of this with your ashes now."

Charcoal obeyed, only too glad to escape without exciting further suspicion.

At a rather later period of that same day there was another scene, in another part of the city, which we may briefly describe, as it is necessary to keep up the thread of our story.

This was in the office of Samuel Jackson, Attorney at Law. This portly personage was leaning easily back in his office-chair, conversing with Miss Eldon, who had just called upon him.

"I saw you in the Orphans' Court to-day,"

she said. "But I was afraid you did not take any interest in what was going on; you seemed so occupied with other matters."

"Yes," was the laughing reply. "It was not my cue to appear interested in your affairs. But you need not fear but that I took it all in. Have you called on Smith & Herring since?"

"I have just come from their office."

"Ah! And what have they to say?"

"That everything is going on very well. They did not intend to show their case to-day, they say. They wanted to find the strength of the other side. But they are doing their best to hunt up evidence in my favor."

"Which explanation you found very satisfactory?"

"Not entirely," answered Clara. "It seemed to me as if they were making no effort. What did you think of it, Mr. Jackson?"

"I have a fancy they intend to sell you out," was his cool reply. "Hunter's statement of his account was a very neatly got up document. It impressed the judge, I could see that. And your counsel simply did nothing, except to help it all they could."

"I was afraid so, myself," she anxiously answered. "Of course, I do not understand the ways of lawyers, but I certainly felt very much dissatisfied."

"Did you tell them so?" quickly.

"No. I did not think it advisable."

"That was right. To never show your hand until you are forced to, is good legal logic."

"But have you done anything yet, Mr. Jackson?" she earnestly inquired. "I was in hopes that you might have found some trace, some clew, that would be of importance."

"Nothing," he rejoined, shaking his head. "I have a correspondent at work in Salisbury, but he has made no favorable report as yet."

"And about the paper which the boy brought you?"

"There has not been time to do anything about that. It is only a few days, you will remember. I have written to Peoria, but it is too soon for a reply. You must have more time, Miss Eldon. Your lawyers must delay the case, I wish you to insist on that. But do not let them know that I advised it."

"Certainly not," answered Clara.

"We must be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, you know," he continued.

At this point their conference was suddenly interrupted. The door was thrown widely open, and the face of Charcoal made its appearance, beaming with importance and self-satisfaction. But his usually natty appearance was remarkably changed. His livery was gone, and he wore a suit of ragged clothes which looked as if they had been picked out of some coal hole. On his shoulder he carried a bundle at the end of a stick, and he might readily have passed for a tramp or a footpad of the first quality, but for the shining eagerness of his face.

"I's got 'um! I's got 'um!" he cried joyfully. "Jiss you b'lieve it, Marse Jackson an' Missy Clara. I's got 'um! Ole rascal Hunter's sold hisself dis time. De little nig's too wide awake for him!"

CHAPTER XI.

CHARCOAL GETS HIS WALKING PAPERS.

We last saw our young friend Charcoal just making his way out of Mr. Hunter's room, with a dust-brush and a pan of ashes. An ordinary person would have said that those ashes were in a fair way to be deposited in the ash barrel. But no one who knew Charcoal would have been sure of that. He had too great a genius for mischief for anybody to count upon his movements.

"Hey, Charcoal!" called Mr. Hunter from his room. "Just tell Dinah to hurry up with that lunch. I haven't had a bite of dinner, and am as hungry as a wolf."

"Course I will, sah," answered the boy, who had just reached the head of the stairs. "I'll send her up squar' off."

"De dinner's all ready. I's got it yere," cried Dinah, from the foot of the stairs.

She had just left the kitchen, and bore a waiter containing a plate of cold roast chicken, some biscuits and butter, and other viands. Her shining black face was turned up to the boy as she made this announcement.

"Stir up then," exclaimed Mr. Hunter, who had not heard the cook. "Stir your stumps, or by Jupiter, if the lunch don't come soon, I may commence by eating you, by way of a snack."

"The laws bress us!" ejaculated the boy, in a tone of alarm.

He had his head at that moment turned toward his master's office, and quite forgot that he stood on the very brink of the stairs, as he took a hasty step forward. A natural result followed. Charcoal's foot came down, but there was nothing for it to come down on, so Charcoal followed his foot.

Over he toppled head-foremost onto the stairs,

the ash-pan and brush flying out of his hands and preceding him down the steep flight of steps.

The fates of ill-luck seemed ruling that day, for that flying pan managed to deposit its contents over every portion of the lunch which Dinah was so carefully carrying. The brush, on the other hand, took a higher flight, and struck the cook on her woolly poll, causing her to start hastily back, with an exclamation of dismay. Her feet tripped and she fell on the broad of her back, the lunch waiter tumbling with a ringing sound, and spreading its ash-sprinkled contents promiscuously over the floor.

But this was not the complete result of Charcoal's unlucky misstep. He followed the pan and brush. Down the stairs he came, with a thump and a groan at every step, making wild efforts with hands and feet to recover himself, but all in vain.

Mr. Hunter ran quickly from his room on hearing the unusual uproar, and the cries of Dinah and the boy. He arrived just in time to see Charcoal finish his wild career at the bottom of the stairs. One last plunge, and one final groan, and he struck head foremost amid the scattered remains of the lunch, the top of his head striking in the pot of butter, while a hot boiled potato was flattened out over his broad countenance.

"What in the fiend's name is going on here?" yelled Mr. Hunter in an angry tone. "Shoot me if this isn't enough to provoke an angel! What are you up to, you donkey-eared son of a raven?"

"Oh, de holy marcy!" screamed Dinah, trying to scramble to her feet. "Did eber anybody see de like? Dar's de lunch clean sp'iled, an' all covered wid ashes. An' maybe de pickaninny killed hisself, for all anybody knows!"

"He kill himself!" exclaimed the irate master. "There's no such good luck. But hang me if I don't feel like finishing the job! Here's my dinner gone to the dogs, and I hungry enough to eat slate pencils. I could murder that hound with a clear conscience. Get up, you villain, and don't lie shamming there, or I'll drop the water pitcher on your thick skull."

At this fierce threat Charcoal gathered himself together and crawled to his feet, turning his face upward toward the angry gentleman, who continued to heap interjections upon his devoted head.

Yet, furious as he was, he could not help giving a grim laugh as he caught sight of the boy's face. For the remnants of a flattened out potato spread in a broad zone across his countenance, while a yellow mass of butter was slowly melting into his thick wool and trickling in greasy drops down along his cheeks and forehead.

He presented a most ludicrous and woe-begone aspect, at which Dinah, as well as her master, could not help laughing, angry as they both were.

"Twasn't my fault," apologized Charcoal. "My foot slipped, an' I couldn't catch myself. You skeered me, Marse Hunter, dat's de fact. I don't b'liebe dar eber was a nigger yit dat tumbled down-stairs a-purpose."

As he spoke he was diligently digging the potato from his eyes and scooping the melting butter from his hair.

"I scared you, eh? You lie, you rascally lump of lamp-black! You flung the dishes down-stairs on purpose, to spoil my dinner, and tumbled down yourself to hide your trick. I know you, blast your hide! There's not a day but you're up to some mischief, and hang me if I put up with it any longer. You can get out of this establishment as quick as your two legs will carry you, for I've had enough of you. Only I'm a soft-hearted fool, I'd have kicked you out of doors a year ago."

"Yer ain't gwine to discharge me, Marse Hunter?" queried the boy, opening his eyes to their full width.

"Well, it looks like that, doesn't it?"

"Arter all I's done for ye?"

"Done for me, you vagabond! You've done nothing except to keep me in a peck of trouble with your tricks."

"Arter libin' wid you eber since I war so high?" persisted Charcoal.

"You've lived with me long enough, then. You can have a chance to show somebody else a sample of your quality."

"Yer ain't in airnest, are ye?" asked Dinah. "Why, de boy didn't tumble down-stairs a purpose. He ain't fool 'nuff fur dat, nohow. Let de boy off, dis time, Mr. Hunter. Dar's more chicken in de kitchen. I'll soon git ye up anoder lunch."

"Burn me, if I let him off, then! I've had enough of him. Come, pack yourself up, you jackanapes! Get out of this before I set my fingers on you, for I'll flatten you up like a pancake, if I do."

It was evident that Mr. Hunter was too angry to be readily pacified. Something must have gone wrong outside, of which Charcoal was reaping the full benefit, for his master was not usually so unreasonable.

"Don't you neber mind, Mom Dinah," said Charcoal, with more dignity. "I don't like to be turned outen doors for nuffin' at all, but I guess I'll git 'long. Dar's more nor one gemman has seen my style, and wanted to 'gage me 'fore now. But I wasn't gwine to leab yere. I warn't goin' back on Marse Hunter, 'cause I knowed he couldn't git 'long widout me."

"The blazes you did!" exclaimed Mr. Hunter, with a grim laugh. "We'll see, my chap. And I don't care a button how many places you get. I hope they'll enjoy you, that's all. Why, any sensible man would go to the State prison before he'd put up with what I have stood.—Vamoose now! I am not going to stand here all day, blathering with you."

"I's got to git my t'ings fust," rejoined Charcoal. "I isn't goin' widout my t'ings."

"Your things!" in a tone of contempt. "What things have you got? I don't believe all you own is worth the value of a sixpence."

"Mebbe dey aren't to you," grumbled Charcoal. "But I sets some store by 'em."

"Very well. Go get your treasures, then. It will save me the trouble of having them thrown in the ash barrel. And off with that livery. You shall not take that away with you. Let me see you before you go out. I don't want you to carry anything away but what belongs to you."

"De boy neber stole nothin' yit," cried the cook, indignantly.

"You shut up, Dinah. Nobody asked your opinion in the matter. Do you take care to leave that livery, boy."

"I don't want de ole livery," exclaimed Charcoal, contemptuously. "I neber did 'prove ob it, anyhow. Dar's too much red in it. It don't agree wid my 'plexion."

"With your complexion!" laughed Mr. Hunter, with a return of good humor. "Off with you, you rascal, or I'll shy a bootjack at your head."

Charcoal made his way grumblingly to his room, to pack up his effects.

It was half an hour or more ere the boy again made his appearance. During this time Dinah had dishd up another lunch for her master, which he had eaten with a relish, and was consequently, in a better frame of mind. He felt, indeed, some compunctions of conscience in regard to Charcoal, to whom he had been so long accustomed, that he hardly saw how he was to get along without him. He began to think, in his after-dinner mood, that he had been too hasty.

"What keeps that boy?" he asked. "Hurry him up, Dinah. I want to see him before he goes."

Charcoal had been engaged about a variety of things of importance to him, not least of which was his careful preservation of the bunch of half-burnt papers, upon which he had based such lively hopes.

But he now came down-stairs, and presented himself before his master, a very different looking object from what he had been before going to his room.

His smart livery was taken off, and was replaced by a most dilapidated suit of clothes, more ventilated than a sieve, for some parts of it would hardly have held a baker's loaf. On his head was a felt hat, with half the rim torn loose and flapping about his ears. Over his shoulder he held a short stick, with a small bundle at the end of it. Altogether it was an extraordinary metamorphosis from the smart youth in livery of a short time before.

"Yere's yer ole livery," said Charcoal, somewhat insolently, as he laid a bundle on the office desk. "You'd best see if it's all dar. 'Cause I don't want nuffin' 'cept my own."

"And where the thunder did you get that suit?" asked Mr. Hunter, eying him curiously. "Why, you're a regular perambulating rag-bag."

"Dem's some ob my ole workin' clothes," explained Charcoal. "Guess you don't keer 'bout dem. I ain't got nuffin' else to put on 'cept dem."

"And you've got next to nothing on now," laughed his master. "If that suit had any more ventilation I am afraid you would hardly be a safe object to trust in the streets.—Here, boy," he continued laughing, "off with those dirty rags, and put on your livery again. I was more than half in fun just now, and will give you another trial. You've been about here too long to be set adrift for a spoiled chicken-bone."

Charcoal listened with some surprise. Here was a decided change in the wind. Some quick thoughts passed through his mind. It was a comfortable place, and no hard work, which just suited him. But, then, there were events soon to take place that would bring his term of service with Mr. Hunter to a sudden termination, and he might as well finish it now, as he was ready to do so.

"Much 'bliged, Marse Hunter, but I guess I'll go," he answered. "Niggers is got some feelin's as well as white folks. Didn't you talk to me jiss now so's a fly wouldn't crawl on me? An' as soon's you say, 'stay yere,' you s'poses I's gwine to jump outen my skin to do it! Nary time. I's got my duds packed up, and guess I won't go frew dat 'job ag'in."

Mr. Hunter looked curiously at the boy. This was an unexpected reception of his offer. He had been so used to calling the lad hard names that he never dreamed that the "nigger" had any feeling about it. He continued to look at him, slowly whistling, while Charcoal stood straight upright, with his bundle over his shoulder, waiting for the end of this inspection.

"Put down that bundle and open it," Mr. Hunter harshly commanded, evidently concluding not to repeat his request to the boy. "Let me see if you are not carrying off some of my property."

"Dar's on'y a pair ob ole shoes, an' some oder little t'ings," explained Charcoal. "Dar's some marbles, and a top, an' a piece ob twine, and—and some chawin' gum. Dat's 'bout all. Don't want none ob your property. Got 'nuff ob my own."

"Open the bundle I say," commanded his master.

"Ain't got no sort ob 'jections," answered Charcoal, as he took the bundle from his shoulder and laid it on the desk. "Dar's nuffin' I's 'shamed of."

He untied the knots of the large handkerchief of which the bundle was composed, and spread it out, revealing a miscellaneous collection of articles such as Charcoal had just named.

"Dar dey is," explained the boy. "Jiss as I tole you. On'y chawin' gum an' marbles and sich. Don't s'pose you wants none ob 'em."

"What's that stuffed in your shoe?"

"Dat? Why dat's on'y a pair ob stockin's. I's gwine barefoot to-day to sabe my shoes an' stockin's."

"And that bunch in the other shoe. What is that?"

"Why, dat's on'y 'lasses candy. I bought some

yesterday, and stuck de balance ob it in de shoe, so's I wouldn't forgit it. Don't s'pose you wants none ob dat neder."

"No, hang me if I do, after it's been through your hands. Tie up your bundle and be off with you, since you are bent on going."

There was a certain degree of anxiety in Charcoal's face while this inspection went on. He now, with a concealed grin of satisfaction, hastily reformed his bundle, and slung it over his shoulder.

"Good-by, Marse Hunter," said the boy, turning toward the door.

"Away with you, you ungrateful rogue," was the harsh response. With a sarcastic grin Charcoal disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEXT MOVE IN THE GAME.

It was shortly after the hour in which Charcoal had made his exit from his old residence, that he made his entrance into Mr. Jackson's office, rather startling that gentleman and his fair client.

Charcoal was, as we have said, an object. Barefooted, and dressed in a suit of clothes that would have disgraced a chronic tramp, with the torn rim of his hat flapping over his right ear, with the footpad's bundle on his shoulder, and a mixture of perspiration and melted butter running down his sooty face, he was certainly a figure to be laughed at or screamed at, according to the mood the person was in.

His advent was met in both ways now. Clara gave a nervous little scream, while Mr. Jackson lay back in his chair, and laughed till the tears stood in his eyes.

The excited eagerness of the boy added to his ridiculous appearance, as he continued to exclaim: "I've cotched 'um! I've cotched 'um! Sold dat ole rascal, Marse Hunter, dis time, suah!"

"You've caught what, you disreputable little reprobate?" asked the lawyer, still laughing. "I hope it isn't the ague, or the yellow fever. What have you caught?"

"I's cotched some more ob dem berry 'portant papers, sich as I brung you afore," answered the boy, with more dignity. "Dar's no mistake 'bout 'em. Marse Hunter he crams 'em in de stove, and tries to burn 'em up. But de little nig was too wide awake. Dey weren't all burnt, an' I's got a bunch ob 'em dat's mebbe worth dar weight in gold."

At this revelation there was a marked change in the demeanor of his listeners. Mr. Jackson sat bolt upright in his chair, with his eyes fixed closely on the speaking face of the boy; while Miss Eldon leaned forward, with clasped hands, her face suffused with the rosy glow of hope.

"Let us see what you have got," exclaimed the lawyer. "I shouldn't wonder if it was something of value, if that man was trying to burn it."

"I hope indeed it may prove so," broke in Clara, in eager tones. "I hope it may prove the turn in the tide of my fortunes."

While they spoke Charcoal had taken the bundle from his shoulder, and deposited it upon the table, and was busily endeavoring to untie the knots, which he only fastened the tighter by his nervous haste. Mr. Jackson looked at him curiously.

"In what ditch or gutter did you pick up that astonishing suit, boy? Why, when you were here the other day you was as neat as a new pin, with your fancy livery. And now you look like an ambassador from Ragland."

"I's 'scharged," answered Charcoal, with a comical grin. "Marse Hunter 'scharged me. An' fur nuffin' at all, on'y tumblin' down stairs an' upsettin' a pan ob ashes on his lunch. An' any nigger mout do dat, ef his foot slipped. He's de most onreasonable man you eber did see. I wouldn't lib wid sich a man—specially arter I was 'scharged."

By this time Charcoal had succeeded in untying the hard knots, and he threw the bundle open, displaying its miscellaneous contents.

There was a renewed laugh as their eyes fell upon the boy's collection of treasures, of which the marbles set off on their own hook, rolling in all directions. He had much ado to catch them and restore them to their places.

"Dem's my t'ings," he explained. "I's moved from Marse Hunter's, and dat's my movin'."

"And a very valuable collection of personal property, I should say," the lawyer gravely responded. "But where are the important papers you spoke of?"

It was Charcoal's turn to laugh.

"Didn't I shet de old boss's eyes up on dem papers?" he exclaimed. "He made me open de bundle, but nary time did he see 'em."

"Nor do I," answered the lawyer. "Where are they?"

"Yere dey are," grinned Charcoal, as he proceeded to extract a tight fitting package from one of his shoes. "I tole Marse Hunter dat were a paper ob 'lasses candy, an' he said he didn't want none of my 'lasses candy. If he'd on'y knowed what kind ob 'lasses candy dat were! Oh my!"

And Charcoal expressed his feelings with a gay whistle, while he unfolded the carefully wrapped piece of brown paper. He threw it open with a gesture of triumph, and displayed its contents, in the shape of a hard mass of scorched papers, burnt half into a cinder.

Mr. Jackson looked at them in dismay. He had not expected quite such a bad bargain as this. Clara, whose eyes were fixed expectantly upon his face, dropped back in her chair, quite discouraged by his dubious expression.

"Bless us, Charcoal, is this all?" he exclaimed. "Why, I doubt if even a Philadelphia lawyer can make anything out of them."

"Dar's writin' on 'em," exclaimed Charcoal eagerly. "I's 'zamin'd 'em."

"Wait a moment, then. Let me take a look," said the disappointed lawyer.

The bunch of papers was one that had been closely laid together, forming a dense mass, into which the fire had failed to penetrate, though it had been considerably burnt around its edges, and was badly scorched throughout. Mr. Jackson carefully inserted a sharp blade of his penknife between two of the layers, and lifted the upper from the lower portion. The face of paper which now showed itself had not the scorched and blackened appearance of the upper, but was only slightly embrowned, while the writing upon it was as plainly visible as ever. The lines of writing were not complete, however, as they had been burnt off all around.

Mr. Jackson bent over and fixed his eyes on the broken lines of writing. A low whistle came from his lips as he read them.

"By Jove, Charcoal," he exclaimed, "I should not wonder if you have really found a prize. This looks mighty suspicious.—There may be something of great value here, Miss Eldon," he continued. "It refers to some operations of John Hunter, as trustee, which were not mentioned in his statement to the court. Do you know if he is trustee for any other estate?"

"I do not think it very probable," she replied. "People would not generally choose such a man as he."

"It will not do to trust to that. People do very strange things. He deceived your father, and may have deceived others. I must look into this matter more deeply."

"Dat's all gammon!" exclaimed Charcoal, excitedly, fearing that his discovery might go for nothing.

"He isn't a trustee for nobody. Ain't I lived wid him? He weren't a trustee eben for me."

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating, friend Charcoal," smiled the lawyer. "We shall see. But I think very likely you are right; and, if so, we have Mr. John Hunter in a very tight place."

"Whar I hope you'll gib him a mighty tight squeeze; 'cause he 'sarves it," answered Charcoal.

Clara had been eyeing the scorched papers dubiously. She began to doubt that anything could be done with them, and expressed herself to that effect.

"I don't know about that," returned the lawyer.

"I must get them in shape first."

"How will you do that? I should think they would fall to pieces if touched."

"I shall lift them off one by one," he explained, "and paste them flat on the leaves of a book. Then I will have them safe, and can examine them at my leisure."

"Dear me! I should never have thought of that," she exclaimed, with a hopeful flash of her eyes.

Ten minutes afterward Charcoal found himself once more in the street. He and Miss Eldon had left the lawyer to his task, Charcoal first requesting the privilege of leaving his bundle in Mr. Jackson's office, until called for.

"And what are you going to do, Sambo?" asked Clara, calling him by his old name. "You have no home, no place."

"Don't worry yerself 'bout Sambo, Missy Clara," was the reply. "I's got some money. An' I'd sooner sleep on a board pile dan on a bed, dese warm nights. Jiss you see if I don't soon git a place."

"I hope so," she responded. "If I succeed in my suit you shall never need a place again. Just now, unfortunately, I am as poor as you."

"Neber you mind, Missy Clara," cried Charcoal, with much feeling. "You's gwine to git yer rights, suah. Marse Hunter can't git ober dem papers, now you see."

Charcoal was not sorry to get away from his young mistress, deep as was his love and admiration for her. It was getting late in the day, and he had another project in his mind to be put through that afternoon, if all things proved favorable.

The fact is that Charcoal had his eyes opened to a late event. His supposed dream of thunder and lightning and bomb-shells did not seem so sure when he came to think of the colored rags pinned to his clothes. He shrewdly argued to himself that no dream yet ever had such an effect as that, and that pins, rags and feathers are not manufactured in sleep.

But if not a dream, what was it? His ideas turned involuntarily to his sworn enemies—Teddy and Patsy. In fact, these young gentlemen had not been silent about their part in the affair, and it did not take much questioning among his cronies for Charcoal to arrive at the whole truth of the business.

He had been victimized, that was the long and short of it. He had been taken at a base disadvantage in his sleep. But he was wide awake now, and revenge is sweet. How to get even with them was the one thought in Charcoal's mind. In short, he had invented a scheme, which he longed to put in execution.

It was no difficult matter to find the two boys. They were easily discovered, with some of their cronies, on their customary playgrounds in the southern part of the city. Charcoal walked up to them with a very innocent expression.

"Hi! look at the nigger!" exclaimed Patsy.

"What's gone wid all his smart clothes?"

"I ain't nobody's nigger now," explained Charcoal. "I's been 'scharged, an' I's my own boss. Dar's nobody to say now, 'Come yere, you lazy nigger!' I's goin' blackberryin', I is."

"Blackberryin'!" cried Teddy, with a sneer. "Why, ther ain't no blackberries inside o' ten miles."

"Mebbe dar ain't, fur you, but dar is for me," was

the confident reply. "An' 'tain't two miles, neder. Guess I knows."

Charcoal walked on with his head in the air. He had not gone far before he was joined by the boys, as he had shrewdly expected.

"See here, Charcoal," exclaimed Teddy. "We ain't got nothin' ag'in' you. Ye's ain't goin' to eat them all."

"Don't s'pose I kin," answered Charcoal. "But I didn't find 'em for you. Dar's plenty ob 'em, but I guess I'll keep 'em for oder nigs, like myself."

"Oh, now, Charcoal!" cried the boys in concert. "We ain't got nothin' ag'in' you. It's only all fun. You might show us where they are."

"Nary time," returned Charcoal, resolutely, as he walked hastily on.

But he was not going to get rid of his customers so easily as that. They followed him closely, bound that he should not enjoy his feast of fruit that day without help. After they had walked considerably more than a mile in a south-westerly direction, the banks of the Schuylkill became visible at no great distance ahead. Charcoal here turned, with a sarcastic laugh.

"I hope you's enjoyed yer walk, young gemmen," he remarked. "Guess I won't go for any blackberries to-day."

"Oh, now, Charcoal! Come, Charcoal! You know we're all on your side."

"What'll you gib me den?"

"I ain't got nothin' 'cept some marbles," answered Teddy. "I'll give you them if you show us where the berries is."

"Dat's a bargain. Hand ober dem marbles."

It was with a chuckle of satisfaction that Charcoal consigned this prize to his pocket, and started to run at full speed, calling out:

"We're gwine right straight fur 'em all de time. De fust feller up gits de fust pick. Hi! white fellers, le's see you run."

They were not slow to obey, and there was a rapid race for the banks of the neighboring river. Teddy and Patsy were the two best runners of the party, and were soon up to, and a little ahead of Charcoal.

"Don't ye see de bushes dere?" cried the latter.

"Right ober de ditch, on de riber bank. Dere's more ob 'em fuder down. An' jiss full ob berries."

"How are we goin' to git over the ditch?" asked Teddy, who was in advance, and saw that there was a wide ditch between them and the bank where the blackberry bushes grew.

"Dar's no water in it," answered Charcoal. "It's dry, and as hard as a stone. We's got to jump right ober."

He put on some extra speed, as if anxious to be first at the bushes. But Teddy and Patsy followed his example, and reached the borders of the dry ditch side by side, Charcoal being a little behind, and the other boys further in the rear. Fully confiding in his representations they leaped side by side from the bank. The ditch was too wide for them to spring across, and they lit just beyond its center. At the same moment Charcoal checked his speed with a scream of laughter, and held out his hand for the other boys to do likewise.

And with reason. For the ditch, instead of being filled with hard earth, held a smooth, treacherous, sticky mud, into which the two confiding boys sunk half-way to their necks, while Charcoal rolled on the ground, screaming and kicking his heels with mirth. And the other boys, too, faithless allies, joined in the merriment of their treacherous guide.

"Oh de laws o' mercy!" yelled Charcoal in delight as Teddy and Patsy struggled in their muddy bath. "Oh, war der eber sech fun? How's ye like blackberries, hey? Any fool'd know dar neber weren't a berry on dem bushes. Got any more fire-crackers, hey? Got any more snuff? S'pose you gib de nigger some, de nex' time you cotch him asleep?"

"Catch him and fling him in too," yelled the two boys, who were now dragging themselves through the mud to the shore.

But Charcoal, with a parting jeer, set off as rapidly as he could for laughter, the remaining boys being soon distanced by the fleet-footed little darky.

But what objects the two tricked lads were when they reached shore! Covered to their waists with a sticky yellow clay, that had anything but a sweet smell, while their shoes had been sucked from their feet in the bottom of the ditch, it was evident from their woe-begone looks that they fancied that Charcoal had the best of the innings at present.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CASE IN COURT.

At Clara's earnest request her legal advisers had obtained several weeks' delay of the law-suit, so that no opportunity of obtaining evidence in her favor might be lost. She did not confide to them that her principal object was to give Mr. Jackson time to work up his side of the case, and trace out that hidden mystery of the western lands.

It was a month after the date of our last chapter when the parties to the suit were again gathered in the rooms of the Orphans' Court, on South Sixth street, Philadelphia.

Clara was present, with her two worthy lawyers; and John Hunter, with his equally worthy advocate. But there were others, who kept a little in the background, yet who were not without an interest in this case. Samuel Jackson, Esq., was there, apparently engaged in some entirely different business. And, from a bench in the rear of the room, shone the black face of Charcoal, who was apparently only interested in keeping the flies off his devoted nose, and smiling at the recollection of how neatly he had paid off his enemies in their own coin.

"We have nothing further to offer, your Honor, beyond our statement of the settlement of the estate," began Mr. Brown, addressing the judge.

"My client, Mr. Hunter, has done his duty as trustee to the best of his ability. But, unfortunately, he found Mr. Eldon's affairs in such a hopeless snarl that he has been all these years engaged in straightening them out, with the result of finding that he died intestate. The debts of the estate have been all paid, and all available assets collected, with the result as shown in the statement in your Honor's hands. There is nothing left for the heiress. In fact, the advances made her by my client have been from his own private fortune. But for that he asks no remuneration."

"The judge looked quietly at him as he spoke, with his spectacles pushed back on his forehead. He then turned over the pages of the statement before him, and asked a few questions about its several items.

These being smoothly answered, he looked up again, with his eyes fixed upon the plaintiff's counsel.

But Messrs. Smith & Herring, though for decency's sake objecting to certain points in the statement, had no new evidence to offer. They had made every effort, they acknowledged, to discover if any proof could be found of the trustee's unfaithful performance of his duty; but in vain.

Mr. Herring made quite an effective little speech, about the duties of guardians, the helplessness of wards and all that sort of thing, but having no more to do with the case in hand than with an earthquake at Hong Kong. He looked frequently at Clara during this neat little address, and was satisfied by her smile that he had made quite a hit with her, if not with the court.

He sat down at length, quite satisfied with his flight of eloquence.

"Well," asked the judge, looking up with his cool smile, "that is very neat; but—is there any evidence? I have here the carefully prepared statement of the defendant. I am sorry for the young lady; but I have heard nothing to call it in question."

It was now Mr. Smith's turn to make an effort, which was, if anything, more wandering, and less to the point, than that of his partner.

The judge listened with great patience. He then again took up the statement.

"Hearing nothing in rebuttal—" he began.

There was, at this point, an unexpected interruption. Mr. Jackson, who had been busily jotting down something in pencil in another part of the room, and apparently paying no attention to the case before the court, now rose.

"Your Honor," he said.

The judge turned quickly toward him.

"Excuse my interruption," he continued. "You were about deciding upon a case in which I have some little interest. I hope you will give me a few minutes first."

These words were heard with considerable surprise. Mr. Hunter grew red in the face as he looked around at the speaker. Nor were Messrs. Smith & Herring less astonished. As for Clara, the persistent smile upon her face deepened. The judge threw back his spectacles.

"Mr. Jackson," he answered. "Why certainly we will hear what you have to say."

"Mr. Hunter has produced a considerable number of papers to the court," began Mr. Jackson. "And yet there are some papers of importance which it would be well for your Honor to see. There is one paper, for instance, which fell by mistake into the hands of Messrs. Smith & Herring, when it was intended to be delivered to Mr. Brown. Will the gentlemen please produce that paper in court?"

These words fell like a thunderbolt upon the conspirators. They looked guiltily from one to the other, their faces slightly paling. The judge looked toward them.

"Why, if it has any bearing on the case," he said, "We certainly should see it."

Smith & Herring whispered together. They were evidently disturbed. It would not do to deny it, for they had seen the dark aspect of Charcoal at the rear of the room.

"Your Honor," began Mr. Herring, after this short conference, "there was such a paper, I admit, delivered by mistake into our hands. But it had no bearing upon this case, and we returned it to the messenger who had brought it, to be delivered to Mr. Brown, its proper destination."

Charcoal, during these words had been gradually edging forward. He now stood bolt upright before the judge, his black face glowing with heat and indignation.

"Who's gwine to b'lieve all dat?" he ejaculated. "It war on'y a copy as you gib me to tote to Marse Brown, an' you took de 'riginal yerself to Marse Hunter; an' sold it to him too, dat's more."

"Ha!" exclaimed the judge angrily. "What does this mean? Hold your tongue, boy! How dare you address the court in that manner?"

"Scuse me," answered Charcoal humbly. "I didn't go fur to do it. It come squar' out itself, when I heered dat Herrin' a liein' in dat fashion."

"Are we to submit to this, your Honor?" exclaimed Herring indignantly. "I repeat that the paper had no bearing on this case. And I should like to know on what grounds or authority Mr. Jackson dares to interfere in a matter with which he has nothing to do."

"Miss Eldon there is my authority," Mr. Jackson quietly answered, pointing to the young lady. "As to the grounds of my interference, they are these," he continued, his voice growing loud and stern, while his keen eyes were fixed upon the last speaker. "I affirm that Miss Eldon is right, and that she has been robbed of her estate by John Hunter. I affirm, moreover, that the counsel whom she had engaged have traitorously sold her out to her enemy. And

I affirm, thirdly, that John Hunter has burnt the papers which would show his villainy in this affair."

There was a sudden uproar in the court at these severe remarks.

Smith, Herring and Hunter, were all on their feet at once, eagerly addressing the judge, full of anger and recrimination.

"There, there, there!" exclaimed the judge. "There are too many spoons in the broth at once, gentlemen. This matter must be settled quietly and calmly. Please keep cool. Mr. Jackson is a reputable attorney. He has been retained by Miss Eldon. He makes severe charges, but they are not sustained as yet. Anger will not decide the matter. We must go through this affair quietly and calmly."

Hunter had by this time settled back upon his seat, with a smile of defiance. The papers were burnt. No one could prove what they were. Let them do their worst.

"You have made a strong statement, Mr. Jackson," continued the judge. "What have you to substantiate it?"

"I have a witness, your honor," replied Mr. Jackson, looking around for Charcoal. "This boy here."

There was a deep scowl on John Hunter's face as Charcoal stepped eagerly forward, and took the oath at the clerk's desk.

Mr. Jackson began to question him. Charcoal told, in his roundabout way, the whole story, of how he had been directed to take a paper to 606 Walnut street, and had taken it to 609 instead. How he had been sent for it, and received a paper from Mr. Smith, which he had left at 606. How, subsequently Mr. Herring had called on Mr. Hunter, and told him that the paper given Mr. Brown was only a copy, and that he still held the original, which he offered to sell him for five hundred dollars.

There was something of a commotion in the court as this evidence came out.

"How do you know this?" exclaimed Herring, starting up, with a very red face.

"I warn't fur away when you an Marse Hunter was absquatlatin' togeder."

"Where were you?"

"Go on, if you wish," smiled Mr. Jackson, "I have no objection for you to take the examination out of my hands."

"I were on de wrong side ob de door," answered Charcoal. "But it ain't de fust time I's heered t'ings frew de keyhole."

"The confounded black villain!" growled his former master, on hearing this declaration.

"Have you any further questions?" asked Mr. Jackson, politely.

"No, no. His Honor can judge of the character of the evidence which is obtained in that manner. I deny the whole story, except that I did return a paper to Mr. Hunter, that fell into my hands by mistake. The paper sent Mr. Brown was quite another affair." And Mr. Herring took his seat again, with a very virtuous look.

"Proceed, Mr. Jackson," said the judge.

"We will drop the question of that paper for the present," remarked the lawyer, "particularly as we do not know just what it was. It is not the only paper concerned. There were a number of others, which Mr. Hunter was wise enough to reduce to ashes in his stove."

"Very sorry I did," replied that gentleman, with a sarcastic smile. "The next time I have old rubbish to burn up I shall call Mr. Jackson in first to examine it. But as all this valuable matter is acknowledged to be turned to ashes I am very much afraid our friend here cannot build up much of a case out of the ashes."

"Perhaps he can," answered Mr. Jackson, with a smile that the last speaker did not quite like.

"What did you get out of those ashes, Charcoal?" he asked the witness.

"Some berry 'portant dockyments," answered Charcoal, with a grin. "De fire didn't burn up all de evidence, for dem papers weren't all conflagrated, by no manner ob means."

"You treacherous villain!" broke out Mr. Hunter, in furious disregard of the court. "You lie, hang you! You got nothing from that stove. And you took nothing out of my house."

"Cept some lasses candy dat were stuffed in one ob de nigger's shoes," Charcoal answered, with a sly laugh.

Mr. Hunter did not need the judge's stern rebuke. Charcoal's reply had quite floored him. The boy had been too sharp for him, after all.

"To what is all this leading, Mr. Jackson?" asked the judge, in a tone of great interest.

"To this, your Honor. The statement offered by the trustee of Mr. Eldon's estate fails to cover the whole of the property committed to his charge. There was also considerable landed property in the West, of which no account is rendered, and whose existence there is not a scrap of paper offered to show."

"Perhaps you can show some scraps of paper relating to these fancied Western lands," remarked Mr. Brown, in a sarcastic tone.

"Exactly. I can show some scraps of paper," replied Mr. Jackson, calmly. "Mr. Hunter's conflagration, unluckily for him, was not complete. Some of his papers escaped burning. You will find the papers in question here, your Honor."

He handed the judge a scrap book, which he had borne under his arm, and on whose leaves were neatly pasted the bits of burned paper which Charcoal had brought him.

The judge looked at them with evident interest. Then his eyes were fixed sternly on John Hunter, whose face had turned from red to pale.

"How are we to explain this?" asked the judge

sternly. "Have you examined into this matter further, Mr. Jackson? If so, what is the result?"

"I have," answered the lawyer. "And the result is that John Hunter is indebted to Clara Eldon in the sum of about one hundred thousand dollars, the proceeds of the sale of the western lands belonging to her father's estate."

"Didn't I know it?" screamed Charcoal. "Dar's no use talkin'. De nigger was too smart fer de white folk dat time."

CHAPTER XIV.

GETTING EVEN.

THE murder was out, as the old saying is. Shrewd as the rascal had been, he had been unlucky in having a friend of the other side in his house. Charcoal, partly by his natural sharpness, and partly by good luck, had upset all the calculations of his villainous master, and preserved to his young mistress the property of which the precious rogue had sought to rob her.

"Don't want to brag as I's de smartest feller goin', Missy Clara," said Charcoal, his black face radiant with satisfaction, "but I's got my eyes open when some oder folks is got dere's shet. Marse Hunter t'ou't he were eber so sharp, but Charcoal fooled him right under his nose. Dat lasses candy did de bizness, Missy Clara. He didn't want none of my lasses candy. Yaw, yaw! Guess he'd better took a bite."

"You are a genius, Sambo," replied the young lady gratefully. "I owe all I am worth to you, and shall never forget it. Your kind recollection of your old playmate is worth all your services to me."

"Why, bress ye, Miss Clara, de nig'd cut his ears off any time if you jiss said so. S'pose I's eber gwine to forgit de days down in ole North Carolina? Don't ye talk 'bout de poor white folks up yere. Ain't gwine to git dis nig to go back on de Carolina hoe-cake, nary time. Talk 'bout yer cities an' all dat! Dey ain't nuffin' 'longside ob de ole plantation."

But though there was so much satisfaction on this side of the question, on John Hunter's side all was not quite agreeable. Despite all his well-laid plans, his bribing of the lawyers, and his effort to render his ward helpless, one unthought-of hole in his net had let all his fish escape.

And Charcoal was the mouse who had nibbled that hole. Naturally, then, the discovered villain was furious against the boy who had exposed his trickery. In fact, his chief anger was concentrated upon Charcoal, and his one idea was to revenge himself upon him. For this purpose he remained in Philadelphia longer than was safe for one who was liable, at any moment, to have a criminal prosecution laid against him, seeking some means of getting the boy in his power.

He found out some of Charcoal's habits and associates, and heard of the trick which he had lately played on the two young Irish vagabonds, Teddy and Patsy. They were furious against Charcoal for the mud bath to which he had treated them, and vowed all manner of vengeance. The matter ended in Mr. Hunter engaging them to take Charcoal prisoner in any manner possible, and bring their captive to his house, when he would see that they were both rewarded and rewarded.

It was late in the afternoon of a day about a week after the court scene, that John Hunter was impatiently pacing the floor of his office, waiting for an expected event. The boys had laid a scheme to entrap Charcoal that afternoon, and the house had been cleared of Dinah and all other persons, so as to avoid any interference with his intended revenge.

"I hope they'll nab the black hound," he impatiently ejaculated. "Things are getting hot for me, and I'll have to make tracks very soon. And I don't intend to go empty-handed," he continued with a grim smile. "The court has not yet made me hand over. They think the property is all in real estate which I cannot make use of. They are a little mistaken there, I have some ready cash which will considerably diminish Miss Eldon's expectations. Let me once get my will out of that confounded nigger; and then, hey, for parts unknown."

He was interrupted by a noise in the hall below; a sort of dragging sound. Hastily leaving the room he looked down the stairs. There were his two confederates, with two others of their cronies; and Charcoal a prisoner in their midst. They had succeeded in entrapping the boy by a well-laid scheme, and had dragged him into the open door of Mr. Hunter's residence, as directed.

"Good for you," cried that gentleman heartily. "Be careful to shut the door, and bring the nigger up-stairs. I've got a little score to settle with him."

Charcoal resisted lustily, but his captors were too strong for him, and dragged him up step after step, despite his struggles. He would have yelled for help, but they had provided for that by a thick plaster of wax which was pressed tightly down upon his mouth.

John Hunter stood with a grim smile of satisfaction as the unwilling captive was dragged into his presence.

"Glad to see you, Charcoal," he satirically greeted him. "It does one's eyes good to see his old friends again. Come to look after some more burnt papers, eh? Just take a look into the stove. Maybe you may find some."

Charcoal made some sputtering sounds behind his mask, meaning, probably, that he was not in search of any burnt papers just then.

"Oh, yes! I insist on it," answered his late master, with cruel pleasantry. "Poke his head in, boys. Let him take a look for papers."

"Sure an' we'll do that same," cried Teddy with a vicious laugh. "He got our legs in the mud. Faith,

if we won't pay him up by puttin' his head in the ashes."

The stove door was thrown open, and Charcoal pulled up to it, though he struggled vigorously. But four to one are great odds, and all his struggles were in vain. His head was forced up to the neck into the open door of the stove. Finally, under the villain's directions, Charcoal's arms were drawn around the stove and his hands tied together, so that he was a prisoner without hope of escape. His hands were so tightly bound that he could not get his head out, while any active movement threatened to cut his neck against the sharp sides of the stove door.

The merciless villain laughed as he surveyed his helpless prisoner, with his head thus thrust into the open door of the upright round stove, and his back sticking out at a curve just suitable for a flogging.

"Any burnt papers there?" he asked, with sarcastic humor. "Suppose we burn some paper for him, boys. He won't be satisfied unless he finds some. And it will be fun to see him dance when he smells the smoke."

Charcoal was dancing already at this heartless suggestion.

"That's the ticket!" yelled Teddy. "Let's scorch the nigger's nose."

"No, no," answered Patsy, cautiously. "It might smother him. It won't be no fun if we get hauled up for murder."

Mr. Hunter cruelly laughed.

"It's no crime to murder a nigger," he remarked. "But we'll let him off this time. We'll just score him, so as to know him when we want him again. Strip off his jacket."

The boys hastened to obey, while their heartless confederate drew forth a short, thick-lashed whip, which he drew knowingly through his hands.

"I'm off on a long journey, Charcoal," he announced. "For fear you should forget me before I return I will leave you something to remember me by. Just a little keepsake."

A choking sort of groan came from Charcoal's lips. His back was now bare, and curved for the lash of his cruel master, who laughed with tigerish ferocity as he drew the whip again through his hand, and stood off, measuring the distance for an effective blow.

The grinning boys stood with their hands on their knees, watching the expected flogging of their old foe.

The lash fell lightly on the bare back, but Charcoal's nerves were so wrought up that he made a start at this mere touch that almost overthrew the stove.

"Some of you hold the stove," commanded Mr. Hunter. "I'll tickle him a little more next time."

He stepped off and raised the lash to the full stretch of his muscular arm. He intended that the blood should follow that blow.

But it never fell. For at that moment the house door below was thrown open, and there was the sound of quick steps on the floor.

Mr. Hunter stood listening, with the whip still upraised. The steps came quickly up the stairs, the office door was thrown open, and two men entered the room.

"What have we here?" cried one of these stern-looking new-comers. "By Heaven, we came in time, it seems! There's some devil's work on hand here. Is not your name John Hunter?"

"That is my name."

"Then drop that whip, and yield yourself my prisoner. We have a warrant against you, on a criminal charge."

"What charge?" he haughtily asked.

"That of fraud, and attempted robbery of your ward, Miss Eldon."

Mr. Hunter grew pale as he dropped the whip. He looked about him like a wolf at bay. The window of the office was raised, and with a quick leap he sprang toward it, darting through the opening and disappearing below.

The man who had spoken followed him, with an exclamation of surprise. The roof of a shed lay just below the window. From that the ground was readily reached.

The officers sprang through the open window in pursuit.

But before doing so one of them had cut Charcoal's hands, and that worthy quickly withdrew his head from its confinement, and tore the mask from his mouth. His eyes glared around. There, on the floor, near him, lay the whip which had been intended for his own back. It was but the work of a moment to seize it, and turn on his shrinking foes.

"You's had yer fun," he ejaculated. "Guess it's Charcoal's turn now. Git, you white trash! Git!"

He was among them, dealing blows to right and left with the whip, with little regard as to whether it fell on their backs or faces. With howls of pain and dread they broke from the door, Charcoal following, using the whip viciously, and yelling with delight at every cry which he brought from his flying foes.

"Didn't beat de nig much dat time," he ejaculated, as he gave a parting blow to the front door, while his foes ran howling down the street. "Guess Charcoal's boss yere now; and I's gwine to hold dis 'stablishment fer Missy Clara, 'coz Marse Hunter has clare absquatulated."

And he did hold it. Mr. Hunter escaped pursuit, but his desire for revenge proved a dear one for him, since he had to leave behind him the funds he had carefully prepared to take with him.

These were found in the house, and as they proved necessary to make up the sum of Miss Eldon's claim they were appropriated to that purpose.

As soon as the proper legal preliminaries were gone through with she was put in possession of the

estate, Charcoal and Dinah holding the fort as garrison until she was ready to step in as mistress.

And here our story may end. The villainous guardian had disappeared utterly. The ward, whom he had attempted to victimize, was in full possession of her property, and, as may be surmised, Charcoal was not the least important of the household which his young mistress gathered around her.

He could never cease chuckling over the way in which he had outwitted "ole Marse Hunter," and had turned the tables on "dem low white trash," and only one unsatisfied wish remained to him, which was "to git back on de ole plantation, and hab a taste once more ob North Carolina hoeecake."

THE END.

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